

# **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE USE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE ON A STANDARDISED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST**

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# DECLARATION

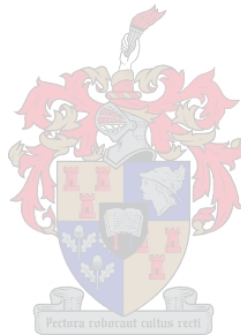
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# SUMMARY

This investigation was aimed at gaining an understanding of the learning processes in the English Foreign Language programme at Stellenbosch University. The relationships between students' reported language learning strategy use and their language proficiency as measured on a standardised English language proficiency test were recorded and the influence of other learner factors such as age, gender, motivation, culture and educational background, and teacher-centeredness versus learner/learning-centeredness in learning situations and curricula were explored.

A literature review was done to provide some insight into similar research conducted internationally and in South Africa and to provide a framework for this investigation. Research contributions by Chamot & Kupper (1989), Mahlobo (1999), Oxford (1990) and Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995a & 1995b) provided insight and a foundation for this investigation.

The research is primarily qualitative and set in an interpretivist paradigm in an attempt to firstly explore the relationship between reported language learning strategy use and English language proficiency in the skills of reading and listening and secondly to explore other factors which could impact on the development of English language proficiency in all four language skills. The study was not concerned with a search for generalisable phenomena, but was aimed at providing a descriptive analysis of the interpreted understanding of social phenomena with regard to English Foreign language learning processes, where English proficiency had to be used for academic purposes. Information was obtained through observation, informal discussions, questionnaires, interviews, focus group interviews and English language proficiency test results.

Results were interpreted for this particular situation at Stellenbosch University and suggestions were made as to how language learning strategies could be incorporated into the English Foreign Language curriculum to optimise the development of English language proficiency. Suggestions for further related research were also made.

# OPSOMMING

Hierdie ondersoek was daarop gemik om insig te verkry in die leerprosesse in die Engels as Vreemde Taal (EFL) program by Stellenbosch Universiteit. Die verhoudings tussen leerders se aangeduide taalleerstrategieë en hulle prestasie op 'n gestandaardiseerde Engelse taaltoets is ondersoek asook ander faktore wat moontlik 'n invloed sou kon hê op die taalleerproses: ouderdom, geslag, motivering, kultuur en opvoedkundige agtergrond, asook onderwyser-gefokusde versus leerder-gefokusde onderrig en kurrikula.

'n Literatuurstudie is gedoen om 'n insig te verkry oor soortgelyke navorsing wat gedoen is op internasionale vlak en in Suid-Afrika, en ook om 'n raamwerk vir hierdie navorsing te voorsien. Die navorsing van veral Chamot & Kupper (1989), Mahlobo (1999), Oxford (1990) en Van der Walt en Dreyer (1995a & 1995b) het bygedra tot insig en 'n agtergrond vir hierdie ondersoek.

Die navorsing is hoofsaaklik kwalitatief in 'n interpretiwistiese paradigma om eerstens die verhouding te ondersoek tussen aangeduide taalleerstrategie gebruik en Engelse taalvaardigheid in the lees- en luistervaardighede, en tweedens om ondersoek in te stel na ander faktore wat moontlik 'n invloed kan hê op die taalleerproses in al vier die taalvaardighede. Die studie is nie in die eerste plek onderneem om veralgemenings te kan maak nie, maar was gemik op die verkryging van 'n beskrywende analise van die sosiale invloede betrokke by die aanleer van Engels as 'n vreemde taal vir gebruik as 'n akademiese taal. Inligting is verkry deur observasie, informele gesprekke, vraelyste, onderhoude, fokusgroeponderhoude en Engelse taalvaardigheidstoetsuitslae.

Bevindinge is ontleed vir die spesifieke situasie by Stellenbosch Universiteit en aanbevelings is gemaak oor die moonlike insluiting van taalleerstrategieë in die leerplan en kurrikula van die Engels as Vreemde Taal (EFL) program. Aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing is ook gemaak.

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Louise.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to all who showed interest in the study: participants, EFL teachers, my study leader, my mother and my sister.

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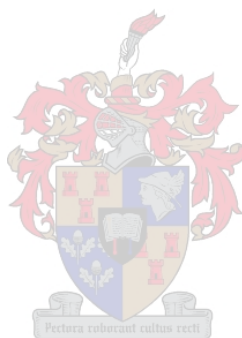
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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **THE AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the past two decades within the field of language learning, there has been a gradual shift away from the emphasis on teachers and teaching towards an increased emphasis on the learner and learning (Brown, 2002; Finney, 2002; Nunan, 1991; Richards, 2002). One consequence of this shift is an increased awareness of and interest in learning styles and language learning strategies, especially in second and foreign language acquisition. International researchers such as Nisbet (2003), O'Malley and Chamot (1995), Oxford (1990), Oxford and Ehrman (1995), Phakiti (2003), Purpura (1997), and also South African researchers such as Dreyer (2000), Mahlobo (1999), Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995a & 1995b) have found in their research that successful language learners use a variety of learning strategies to overcome the problems they face when learning a new language.

The focus of this research was the investigation of a possible relationship between language learning strategies and English language proficiency measured in this case using the TOEFL standardised language proficiency test, as well as some learner factors which might influence the development of English language proficiency. This chapter provides the context of the study, the research questions, the paradigms in which this study is situated, and the research design (including the scope and parameters of the study). It also provides a brief explanation of the key concepts in the research and an overview of the subsequent chapters. I have tried to avoid the use of gender pronouns as far as possible. Where '*he*' is used in this document, it denotes that the gender is unknown and is not meant as a slight to women.

### **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This section outlines the nature of the study and provides a description of the research problem.

The English language proficiency of international students at Stellenbosch University is essential for their general academic success. Adequate English language proficiency also broadens their career prospects as English moves to become the global lingua franca – especially in the academic environment.

Most of the international students at Stellenbosch University learnt English as a foreign language at school as part of their school curriculum but find themselves having to use it as the LoLT at this institution. Despite their previous exposure to English, many learners do not have the required level of English language proficiency to undertake independent postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University. Unfortunately international students are often admitted to academic programmes based on their academic qualifications and heads of departments who sign the admission forms are often not aware that language ability in English could be of greater importance than previous academic performance. Staff members who have to support these students frequently see them as 'English deficient' international students in academic matters and see themselves as confronted with an ethical dilemma – and a time dilemma (private communication). When students are unable to produce work in English at an acceptable level, the supervisors often use language editors to do heavy editing. This raises an obvious ethical question as to whether such students can justifiably claim the work as their own.

In an attempt to address this situation, the International Office set up an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programme to assist international students to improve their English skills. At the time of investigation, the EFL programme consisted of six levels. When international students arrived at the University, they took a compulsory non-standardised English proficiency test. The results had two purposes. On the one hand they were used to assist faculties in determining whether a student was likely to manage postgraduate studies through the medium of English. Except in the case of the students who qualified for exemption, faculties did normally not accept students before they had successfully completed the advanced (level 6) EFL course. On the other hand, they were used to advise students on which EFL course they should take – if any. Students participated in each level for 6 weeks, with 24 contact hours per week. Students were promoted to the next level only if they had passed the formal assessment.

More than 90% of the international students at Stellenbosch University are postgraduate and it would be reasonable to assume that they have reached a stage where learning is self-directed, implying that they have developed advanced learning strategies. This, however, is not necessarily the case. One of the ways of assessing whether this is so would be to test their ability to use learning strategies, especially language learning strategies (LLS) in the EFL curriculum at the time when the TOEFL test is done (Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1990).

### 1.3 RATIONALE

This study represents an ongoing commitment to my own professional development. I have a long-standing interest in additional language learning. I taught EFL at Stellenbosch University from 1997 to 2005. Before that, I taught Xhosa as a third (or foreign) language to a variety of students and professionals.

At Stellenbosch University I was concerned about the disparity between students' performance in the English lessons in the EFL programme and performance in tasks that formed part of their academic programme. They performed reasonably well in the English class in the sense that they were able to do the grammar exercises and a variety of the other practical exercises from the text books and teacher-produced materials during class. However, EFL students in postgraduate programmes did not seem to have the linguistic proficiency in English to enable them to produce the work they were required to do as part of their academic courses. For me this was both disappointing and frustrating. Since my view of learning is that, given the right programme and appropriate teaching, all students can be successful learners, I needed to find out how the EFL programme should be adapted in order to close the gap between the students' inadequate linguistic skills and those required in their academic programme. For me it was important to explore ways in which students could play an active part in developing greater proficiency in English. This investigation thus stemmed from my personal commitment to being an investigative, critical, reflective and responsible language practitioner. Darlington and Scott's (2002:18) statement reflects the motivation for my research: "For some qualitative researchers the questions they explore grow out of a strong ideological commitment and the pursuit of social justice". Finding ways to help learners improve their English proficiency would not only meet the need to offer an appropriate programme, but it could help the students to meet their personal and academic goals, improve the quality of research output and save on the time it takes them to complete tertiary studies.

Each institution, or even each academic programme within an institution, has a minimum level below which lack of sufficient proficiency in English contributes significantly to lack of academic success (Graham, 1987:505; Leibowitz, 2004; Leibowitz, 2005:661). Stellenbosch University has set a minimum required level of English proficiency at a score of 550 on the paper-based TOEFL test, a score of 217 on the computer-based TOEFL test and a score of 6.5 on the IELTS. Prospective students who do not meet these requirements have the opportunity to participate in the University's EFL programme in order to attain the required level.

Recent empirical research emphasises the relationship between Language Learning Strategy (LLS) use and good scores on English proficiency tests (Dreyer, 1992; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Good language learners are believed to use language learning strategies where they take responsibility for their own learning and which then makes them more successful in the acquisition/learning of a new language. This is seen to be an important skill since learners will continue to learn even outside the classroom and without prompting by a teacher (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

The North American private educational measurement organisation, Educational Testing Service (ETS), has various English proficiency tests, of which the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is perhaps the most commonly used worldwide. Most people who take the TOEFL test are planning to study at colleges and universities where instruction is in English. The TOEFL test is also used for non-South African citizens who do not have English as a mother-tongue to gain academic admission to postgraduate programmes at Stellenbosch University.

Each form of the current paper-based TOEFL test consists of three separately timed sections: *Listening and comprehension* (where the ability to understand spoken North American English is measured), *Structure and written expression* (which measures the recognition of structure and grammar in formal written North American English) and *Reading comprehension* (which measures the ability to read and understand short passages that are similar in topic and style to what North American students would encounter in tertiary studies) (<http://www.ets.org>). This test has a score scale range of 310-677 and Stellenbosch University deems a prospective student with a minimum score of 550 on this test to have proficient English skills to pursue post-graduate studies.

In summary, the rationale for the study was as follows:

- Firstly, to gain insight into the patterns of LLS use of different individuals, and how they reportedly use the strategies.
- Secondly, to learn more about how LLS use differs in different situations and with individuals from different backgrounds in order to learn more about factors which could possibly have an influence on the use (or non-use) of LLS in the language learning environment.
- Thirdly, to determine (from recent international and South African empirical research on the relationship between Language Learning Strategy (LLS) use and good scores on English proficiency tests and from knowledge gained in this investigation) which LLSs and other factors underlie successful performance in English language

proficiency assessments so that the EFL curriculum at Stellenbosch University can be adapted to include instruction in the LLSs that seem to promote success.

## 1.4 AIMS

My interest in this area of research stems from my teaching and learning experiences over the past fifteen years. When teaching an English Foreign Language (EFL) class, I would anxiously follow the development of language proficiency in the different individuals. Some would develop their proficiency much faster than others and yet they started off on the same level of English proficiency and were in the same EFL class. When I attended training courses for my own enrichment, I noted the same phenomenon amongst course participants. I furthermore noted in my training courses that those individuals who displayed a greater proficiency in English (the majority of training I attended was through the medium of English), seemed to grasp the course content much more quickly than the rest of the class, irrespective of the subject matter. My observations led me to believe that language proficiency was an important predictor of successful learning. Recent research by Leibowitz (2004) supports my conclusion that language proficiency plays an important role in learning and education. In her article she states that adequate language proficiency is a very important factor in the learning process, especially academic language literacy, when embarking on post-graduate studies where a certain level of language proficiency is required - particularly in the skills of reading and writing (Leibowitz, 2005:661). Through observing my course mates on different courses and EFL students in my classes, I furthermore realised that adequate language proficiency alone is not enough to guarantee success in learning: other factors like motivation could be at play.

My aim in this research study has thus been to find out whether there is a significant relationship between the use of language learning strategies and language proficiency, and to identify other possible learner factors that influence the development of language proficiency – in particular English language proficiency of foreigners in South Africa.

Knowledge of how best to meet the needs of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners should inform language teaching methodology. It is, however, no simple matter to arrive at this knowledge. As the comprehensive survey of second language acquisition by Ellis (1997) shows, researchers disagree on fundamental issues. Krashen (1982) for instance, argues that the main requisite for language acquisition is comprehensible input whilst others argue that the opportunity for output is crucial (Swain, 1995). Another key issue is whether it is best to take a 'natural' approach (i.e. without conscious attention to distinctive features of language), or to pay conscious attention to form. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that the goal of enabling the student to improve his standard of language proficiency requires

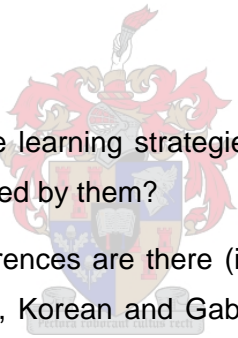


an understanding of the language learner and the influential factors in the language learning process (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; Oxford 2002).

The purpose of this study was to obtain greater insight into the possible benefit for students if language learning strategies were to be incorporated into the English language programmes offered at the University of Stellenbosch. This study aimed to explore the relationship between Language Learning Strategy use and performance on English proficiency assessments in order to establish whether the inclusion of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in the EFL curriculum at Stellenbosch University could contribute to the attainment of required levels of English proficiency.

The research set out to explore the relationship between language learning strategies and effective language production as measured in a standardised test of language proficiency (TOEFL) in some of the participants (a group of 7 EFL students), and as measured by the level of course enrolment in the remainder of the participants (a group of 19 prospective English teachers in their final year of training).

The research questions were:

- 
1. What complex of language learning strategies is used by each of the learners, and how were the strategies used by them?
  2. What similarities and differences are there (in the language learning strategies they use) between the German, Korean and Gabonese students and between male and female students?
  3. What factors seem to underlie successful English language performance (a score of 550 or more in the TOEFL test)?
  4. What changes should be made to the English language (EFL) courses for international students at Stellenbosch University?

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODS**

The primary knowledge interest in this investigation was the relationship between Language Learning Strategy (LLS) use and English Language proficiency. Since the appropriate approach to seeking an understanding of this information was exploration, a qualitative interpretive research paradigm seemed appropriate. This required the researcher to be actively involved in the process of negotiated meaning, of understanding behaviour in a social setting. From this understanding a researcher can identify patterns of meaning which emerge, and make generalisations from them (Connole, 1993).



Qualitative research involves data production in the form of written or spoken language, or data in the form of observations. This data is analysed by identifying and categorising themes, allowing the researcher to study selected issues in depth. Qualitative research is naturalistic and inductive and if the purpose of any research is to study phenomena in a real-life situation without manipulation (as in the case of language acquisition), a qualitative approach is required (Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative methods of data production (e.g. interviews, observations) are often used in an interpretive research paradigm to enable researchers to make detailed observations of a few cases so that a deeper understanding of phenomena in a given context can be acquired. The context of research is always important, but even more so in an interpretive paradigm since human social behaviour is context-related.

I made use of purposive sampling in this investigation, which I would, based on information gained from Babbie and Mouton (1998 & 2001), Durrheim (1999) and Kerlinger (1986), explain as a type of non-probability sampling characterised by the use of judgment and a deliberate effort to obtain representative samples by including typical areas or groups in the sample. This means that the researcher finds suitable units of analysis/participants to study by using human judgment and logic. As a result, there are many opportunities for error (Kerlinger, 1986). In this investigation I do not intend to use the results to make generalisations and purposive sampling was thus suitable for the research. The units of analysis were individuals – prospective Stellenbosch University and Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) students taking EFL lessons at the international office in order to gain admission to postgraduate programmes at Stellenbosch University and diploma programmes at CPUT. The sample originally consisted of 20 Stellenbosch University and CPUT applicants who were already in the University's EFL programme and who voluntarily signed up for the institutional TOEFL test – providing a random and representative sample for the purpose of this limited investigation. Their TOEFL scores would have been used to select nine (9) learners for participation in the empirical study, namely three (3) high-performance learners, three (3) average-performance learners and three (3) low-performance learners. The nine students would have joined the study voluntarily and would have self-reported their language learning strategy use by completing the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990). SILL is a Likert-scale self-report inventory which assesses the frequency with which the participant uses a variety of language learning strategies when learning a foreign or second language (Oxford, 2001:166). A Likert scale provides a way by which researchers can measure the degree of agreement or disagreement of the respondents to a question. A typical SILL item asks the respondent to indicate frequency of use on a five-point scale. The SILL covers all four language skill areas: listening, reading, speaking and writing (Oxford, 1990).

Once the prospective Stellenbosch University and CPUT students had taken the TOEFL test, I could however not find the 9 participants with different levels of performance that I was looking for: none of the TOEFL test-takers scored high enough (at least 550) to be regarded high-performance learners. I therefore used the 7 TOEFL test-takers who volunteered to participate in the study once all the TOEFL test-takers had received their TOEFL scores.

The study was preceded by a literature review which includes relevant research on LLS use and language proficiency. Recent research has suggested that strategy training, and thus language learning strategy use can be associated with many cognitive, social and affective aspects of the individual. Taking account of individual characteristics (e.g. personality type, strategy use, gender, attitude, age and motivation) and their interaction with instructional methodology may assist researchers to bring about a theoretical model of language learning to assist both language curriculum designers and teachers of language (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

English language proficiency for academic purposes and more specifically how Language Learning Strategies impact on the acquisition of this proficiency constitutes a vast research field. The following parameters have thus been set for the purpose of this investigation:

- The research focuses exclusively on English Language Proficiency for Academic purposes.
- Most of what is discussed may apply to various tertiary education institutions, but the context of this investigation is limited to prospective undergraduates (seeking admission to CPUT) and prospective post-graduates (seeking admission to Stellenbosch University) in EFL/ESL preparatory classes at Stellenbosch University.
- The target group in this investigation was non-English post-school students who had not previously completed tertiary studies through the medium of English.

## **1.6 TERMINOLOGY**

### **1.6.1 Curriculum and syllabus**

For the purposes of this study *syllabus* will be regarded as a synonym for *curriculum*. In the simplest sense a curriculum can be regarded to be a specification (aims, methodology and assessment) of the content and the ordering of the subject matter to be taught (Carter & Nunan, 2001; Finney, 2002; Johnson, 1989).

Habermas (1972:301) claims that no knowledge is neutral, but constructed according to the values and assumptions of the participants, and he further says that knowledge is constructed on the basis of three fundamental human interests which he calls “technical” (a reality that can be discovered, measured and manipulated), “practical” (a reality where there is the desire to take the appropriate action within the environment) and “emancipatory” (a reality where social powers are challenged in an attempt to transform them). McKenna (2003:216) also views the construction of knowledge from these three vantage points, but she calls them *Positivist* (“technical”), *Interpretive* (“practical”) and *Critical* (“emancipatory”). She uses these three different views on the construction of knowledge to provide a very interesting description of how different approaches to curriculum development result in different types of curricula.

Approaching curriculum development from a *positivist paradigm* would result in a reflection on teaching and learning that is fairly empirical where knowledge is regarded to be a set of skills to be transferred from the skilled educator to the unskilled students. This approach would simplify the curriculum to “objectives + inputs = outputs”. The immediate, measurable and methodological aspects of this type of curriculum are valued highly (McKenna, 2003:217). I have found this approach to curriculum development useful in teaching Mathematics and Accountancy over the past 17 years of my teaching career, but in language teaching (I have been teaching English as a second and foreign language as well as isiXhosa as a third language) this approach seemed to produce less favourable results, because although each language has a grammar with a set of rules, a grammar and its rules cannot be regarded to be the sum of discrete parts of a language.

In the *interpretivist paradigm*, knowledge is regarded to be a process of creating meaning through interaction. The curriculum is thus not viewed as a linear equation, but is rather seen as an ongoing activity shaped by interaction between educator, learner, classroom and broader context. In a curriculum based on this paradigm the language classroom is characterised by authentic language in use activities (McKenna, 2003:218).

A curriculum based on a *critical paradigm* concerns itself with the emancipatory function of teaching and learning. The epistemology of this paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed. Curriculum development therefore critically engages with the ideologies of the educator, learner and other elements of the subject matter. The curriculum is scrutinised for ingrained power relations and the language classroom would be a site of critical awareness of the ways in which language both subjugates and empowers (McKenna, 2003:219). My view is that an EFL curriculum for academic purposes (for example at Stellenbosch University) should be emancipatory in that the knowledge in the curriculum must be socially

constructed through interaction between the teacher, learner and the subject matter to provide optimum benefit for all learners in the EFL programme. This approach will enable learners with different learning styles and from different cultural and educational backgrounds to gain from the EFL programme, because they bring to the learning situation their own unique characteristics and they are part of the construction of the curriculum.

### **1.6.2 English language proficiency**

Before engaging in a discussion on how to address the language needs of students who have insufficient English language proficiency, it is necessary to understand what language proficiency encompasses. Unfortunately there is no consensus amongst researchers on a clear definition of language proficiency. Cummins (1984), for example, states that the nature of language proficiency has been understood by some researchers as consisting of 64 separate language components and by others as consisting of only one global factor. Valdés and Figueroa (1994:34) state that:

...what it means to know a language goes beyond simplistic views of good pronunciation, "correct" grammar, and even mastery of rules of politeness. Knowing a language and knowing how to use a language involves a mastery and control of a large number of interdependent components and elements that interact with one another and that are affected by the nature of the situation in which communication takes place.

The complexity of language and the lack of consensus as to the exact nature of language proficiency has led me to use, in this investigation, a standardised test for English language proficiency (the paper-based TOEFL); not because I believe it to be the ultimate proof of language proficiency in English, but to provide a standard measure for purposes of comparison.

For the purposes of this investigation I do not need a very specific, calculated definition of language proficiency and I will regard proficiency in English to be the ability to use English effectively for communication purposes in different situations or settings: social, academic and professional. The TOEFL test I used does not provide an indication of proficiency in all four language skills, but only in the skills of reading and listening. Writing and speaking are not measured in the TOEFL test, but these skills were referred to by participants in their completion of the SILL questionnaires. A certain level of proficiency in all four language skills was thus assumed and my assumption was based on the level of English classes the students participated in at Stellenbosch University.

### 1.6.3 ESL and EFL

ESL and EFL are terms that are often used interchangeably, but Oxford and Ehrman (1995:378) draw a clear distinction between the two concepts. They regard English Second Language users to be those who are involved in speaking English for daily survival, while English Foreign Language users may need English for only some sections of life, e.g. in their careers or for recreation purposes. Crystal (1988) defines a foreign language as a language that enjoys no official status in a country. Drawing on the views above, but relying more on those of Oxford and Ehrman (1995), both EFL and ESL are found in South Africa amongst different people in different contexts (although English does have an official status in South Africa). However, drawing a distinction between ESL and EFL in this context is not easy. The students involved in this investigation generally come from a situation in which English had been learnt as a foreign language with concomitant expectations. They had very little opportunity to engage in English outside the English classroom setting. In South Africa their situation is more complex. On the one hand, their ability to use English in the academic sphere directly affects their future careers: they have to use English as a vehicle to demonstrate their ability to perform as students in a particular programme at the required level. On the other hand they also have to use English for day-to-day survival activities like shopping and receiving medical attention. As an official South African language, but also as an international language, English enjoys a very high status in South Africa in the academic, entertainment and business world. The situation of these particular international students at Stellenbosch University is one in which the students' English could more accurately be described as EFL since the goal is the desired level of proficiency in English in the academic sphere. For this reason, but also because the term had been used by the International Office for its English programme, the term EFL will be used throughout this investigation, unless the use of ESL is required in a specific situation to draw a distinction between ESL and EFL.

### 1.6.4 Learner factors

These are factors that influence the learner's effectiveness in learning a language and could include, but are not necessarily limited to: age, anxiety, aptitude, attitude, cultural background, educational background (in particular a teacher-centred approach versus a learner-centred approach), gender, learning styles, motivation, and personality type (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 2000). In life in general, motivation is often a primary contributing factor to success; this is also true for the acquisition of a second, or foreign, language. For the purposes of this investigation I will draw on a definition by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) and regard motivation to be the EFL learner's orientation towards the goal of learning English. Based on work done by Gardner (1982) and Ellis (1997), motivation can be divided into *integrative motivation* (where the learner has a positive attitude towards the target language group and wants to integrate into the target language

community) and *instrumental motivation* (where the learner has a functional reason for learning the language, e.g. academic purposes). Researchers have found both instrumental and integrative motivation to be important, but they argue that integrative motivation sustain long-term success in second language acquisition (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991 & Ellis, 1997).

### **1.6.5 Target Language**

This is regarded to be the new language a language learner is acquiring or learning through conscious effort. This term can be used to refer to a second or a foreign language (Oxford, 1990:6). In this investigation the target language is English. The target language will often be referred to as the second language (L2) in this research to draw a distinction between the participants' mother tongue (L1) and the English they are learning.

### **1.6.6 The four language skills**

Language teaching and research activities are often grouped according to one of the four language competence skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Although the TOEFL proficiency test used in this investigation only tested two of the skills, viz. reading and listening, the scope of this research extends beyond that to also include the other two skills of speaking and writing.

### **1.6.7 Language learning strategies**

Before we explore different classifications of language learning strategies, it would be a good idea to clarify what is to be understood when using the term "language learning strategy". O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper & Russo (1985:22) very appropriately note that:

There is no consensus on what constitutes a learning strategy in second language learning or how these differ from other types of learner activities. Learning, teaching and communication strategies are often interlaced in discussions of language learning and are often applied to the same behaviour. Further, even within the group of activities most often referred to as learning strategies there is considerable confusion about definitions of specific strategies and about the hierarchic relationship among strategies.

One of the earliest researchers in the field of language learning strategies, Rubin, provided a very broad definition of learning strategies: "... the techniques of devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge..." (Rubin, 1975:43).



Although O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper & Russo (1985:22) expressed their concern with regard to formulating a definition for language learning strategies, they did formulate a definition to guide their research: "operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper & Russo, 1985:23). Oxford (1990:8) used a very similar definition: "operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information".

When investigating aspects and use of language learning strategies it is also very important to bear in mind the overall objective of language learning strategies: to improve communicative competence. In this investigation I will make use of Oxford's definition of language learning strategies, interpreting information as relating directly to meaning making.

### **1.6.8 Teacher centredness versus learner/learning centredness**

Teachers and researchers have realised that there is often a mismatch between the teacher's pedagogical intentions and educational plans, and the outcomes presented by learners in the display of their skills through assessments. Nunan (1995) did research on the possible closing of this gap between intention (of the teacher) and reality (displayed by student) in the learning process. He investigated a teacher-centred curriculum versus a learner-centred curriculum. In the teacher-centred curriculum the teacher takes the initiative (and the responsibility to ensure learning) in the learning situation, while in the learner or learning centred approach learners become active role-players in the learning process. He says: "A learning-centred classroom carries learners towards the ability to make critically pedagogical decisions by ... training them in the skills they need to make such decisions." (Nunan, 1995:134). Everything learners and teachers do in a classroom is supported by learning strategies. Learners would thus need skills in the effective application of language learning strategies to become more productive participants in their own language learning process. A reasonable first step towards a more learner and learning centred classroom and curriculum would be to raise learners' awareness of the underlying strategies in particular language tasks.

## **1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE OTHER CHAPTERS**

Chapter 2: In this chapter a literature review is presented of recent research on Language Learning Strategy use and other affective, cognitive and social factors that influence language learning. To narrow the literature review suitably for this research, I focus on research applicable to the learning of English as a foreign and second language. Research in other countries as well as the South African context is discussed.

Chapter 3: In this chapter I attempt to provide a detailed description of my choice of research methodology to explain why the investigation developed in the way that it did. I elaborate on the research paradigm and research methods used in the investigation and attempts to clarify why these were the most appropriate ones in this case. I also describe the research process in detail, highlighting my role as a researcher and giving information on the participants and the production of data. The research methodology changed as the study progressed and I gained first-hand experience of the 'messiness' of qualitative research. The research plan had to be amended continuously in the light of changed circumstances and in the light of the data generated.

Chapter 4: This chapter contains the presentation of the data and information obtained in the research study. It also provides an analysis and interpretation of the data in relation to the research questions. The analysis and interpretation is linked to the literature review of previous research (as discussed in Chapter 2) and reflects on the findings.

Chapter 5: This final summary of the research indicates whether new light has been shed on the relationship between language learning strategy use and English proficiency and attempts to advise EFL/ESL students and teachers on possible intervention (through Language Learning Strategy use) to enhance English proficiency. Shortcomings and limitations of the research methods and the investigation are also mentioned.

## **1.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided the context of the research and more specifically for the research questions. I attempted to provide an outline of the theoretical and conceptual framework through providing my motivation for the study and a summary of the research. I also suggested the possible value of this research in a given context and gave an overview of the other chapters.



## CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE RESEARCH / CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 FRAMEWORK

As is evident in Stellenbosch University's language policy on the University's web page <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Taal/taalbeleid2004.doc> (download date 25 January 2006), Stellenbosch University is committed to the use and sustained development of Afrikaans as an academic language, but at the same time acknowledges the status of English as an international language of communication. Afrikaans is therefore by default the language of learning and teaching at undergraduate level, while both Afrikaans and English are used at postgraduate level.

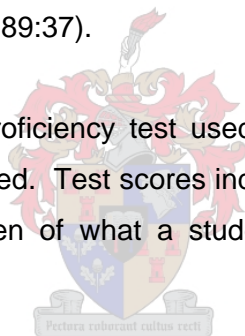
International students therefore have a choice between Afrikaans and English at postgraduate level. Many of the students who choose to do their studies in English, however, lack the necessary proficiency required. In order to enable them to overcome this language barrier, the International Office of the University set up an English instruction programme (EFL) in 1998. This programme was well organised and courses on offer were of a high standard, but many of the students in my EFL classes mentioned to me that despite the micro skills taught in the EFL classroom, they often experienced frustration when they attempted to, but were unable to, significantly engage in an English operating environment because of English language skills acquired in isolation. The investigation undertaken explored the experiences and language learning needs of some of the participants in this English programme. The key elements of the investigation relate to the assumed relationship between the use of Language Learning Strategies and the development of English language proficiency. In this chapter relevant literature is also explored in order to establish a conceptual framework for the research.

In the field of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs), as in many others, there are important differences in the terms that are viewed as significant and in the way they are used. Consequently, the terminology relevant to this study will be briefly explored and relevant terms and concepts are defined in the way that they are used here.

Secondly, different views on what is to be included under LLS are weighed and conclusions are drawn. A number of researchers (including, but not limited to Bialystok, 1981; Naiman,

Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Tarone, 1983) have provided different classifications of Language Learning Strategies and some of these will be discussed briefly as part of the process of constructing a framework for this investigation. It seems that different clusters of LLSs influence the development of each of the four different language skills. For example, second language (L2) listening comprehension benefits from strategies of elaboration, inferencing, selective attention, and self-monitoring, while L2 reading comprehension uses strategies like deduction, guessing, reading aloud, and summarising. L2 speaking demands strategies such as circumlocution, paraphrasing, risk-taking, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, while second language (L2) writing has been found to benefit from the language learning strategies of deduction, planning, self-monitoring, and substitution (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1990). In this regard, Oxford provides a detailed chart that maps strategies associated with listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills. It is significant that students on different language proficiency levels tend to use different LLSs. Students with an intermediate level of English proficiency tended to use proportionately more metacognitive language learning strategies than students with beginning level English proficiency (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper & Russo, 1989:37).

Thirdly, an explanation of the proficiency test used in this investigation (the paper-based TOEFL institutional test) is provided. Test scores indicating language proficiency will also be explained and an indication given of what a student with a certain score is considered generally capable of doing.



Fourthly, a summary is provided of recent research into the correlation between LLS use and language proficiency. Researchers have found that successful language learners make use of different types of learning strategies. Generally, the language learner who is able to use a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately is better equipped to improve his language skills (Fedderholdt, 1997). Factors other than LLSs have also been found to influence language learning and language proficiency: learning style is an important factor (Dreyer, 2000), along with gender (Catalan, 2003; Oxford, Ehrman & Nyikos, 1988), age (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995), nationality or ethnicity, beliefs, previous educational (Mahlobo, 1999) and cultural experiences (Bedell & Oxford, 1996; El-Dib, 2004), learning goals, and motivation (Dickinson, 1987; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Furthermore, it is likely that different kinds of learners (e.g. analytic vs. global or visual vs. auditory) might benefit from different modes of language learning strategy training (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford, 2003). There is also the possibility, as Skehan (1989:76) points out, that less successful language learners may use the 'good' language learning strategies; other reasons explain their limited success. Vann and Abraham (1990:192) found evidence which suggests

that both 'successful' and 'less successful' language learners can be active users of similar LLSs, though it is important to note that they also found that their less successful learners "apparently...lacked...what are often called metacognitive strategies...which would enable them to assess the task and bring to bear the necessary strategies for its completion". It appears, then, that the number and range of LLSs are important if L2 teachers are to assist students both in learning the L2 and in becoming good language learners. This investigation will therefore also explore factors related to LLSs in the learning process as mentioned above as these seem to also impact on L2 learning and proficiency.

This section will also include information on research paradigms and methodology applied in related research. Much research on language learning strategies after 1990 make use of the SILL questionnaire compiled by Rebecca Oxford and published in 1990 (Griffiths, 2003; Mahlobo, 1999; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a). Research into the relationship between LLS use and language proficiency mostly take the form of case studies (Griffiths, 2003; Mahlobo, 1999; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a; Yongqi Gu, 2003).

Finally, some research findings on the ways in which LLS instruction can be applied in the EFL classroom are outlined based on a literature survey of the successful implementation of LLS by other researchers. Questions that are addressed include: What types of language learning strategies appear to work best with which learners in which contexts? Does language proficiency play a role in language learning strategy use and training and which language learning strategies should be taught at which levels of language proficiency? What is the EFL teacher's role in teaching language learning strategies and are certain language learning strategies learned more easily in the classroom or outside the classroom?

## **2.2 LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES – DIFFERENT VIEWS AND CLASSIFICATIONS**

Research relating to language learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from a desire to identify the characteristics of effective language learners. Research on the "good language learner" (Rubin, 1975) resulted in the identification of language learning strategies reported by students and/or observed in language learning settings that appear to contribute to learning. All language learners use language learning strategies either consciously or unconsciously when processing new information and performing tasks inside and also outside of the language classroom. In an attempt to establish what good language learners do to make them more successful than other language learners various characteristics of a good language learner have been identified. Although these vary from

one researcher to the next, there seems to be general agreement that the following are some attributes of a good language learner:

- He takes charge of his learning and has a strong drive to communicate.
- He organises information about language.
- He makes intelligent guesses, often using contextual clues to facilitate comprehension.
- He is willing to use the language even if he makes mistakes.
- He creates opportunities to use the language.
- He monitors his own progress and that of others.

(Brown, 1994; Oxford, 1990, 2001 & 2002; Rubin, 1975 & 1994; Rubin & Thompson, 1982).

Language learning strategies can broadly be described as actions language learners take to improve their language learning in order to achieve the goals of language proficiency they have set for themselves (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990 & 2002; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a).

### **2.2.1 Different classifications**

A number of L2 strategy classification systems have been compiled by different researchers and can roughly be divided into the following groups: (1) systems related to successful language learners (Rubin, 1975); (2) systems based on psychological functions (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazaneres, Kupper & Russo, 1985); (3) linguistically-based systems dealing with guessing, language monitoring, formal and functional practice (Bialystok, 1981) or with communication strategies like paraphrasing or borrowing (Tarone, 1983); (4) systems related to separate language skills (Cohen, 1990 & 1998); (5) systems based on different styles or types of learners (Sutter, 1989); and then (6) a very widely used system compiled by Oxford which divides strategies into direct and indirect strategies, which includes social and affective strategies (Oxford, 1990). Most of these attempts to classify language learning strategies reflect more or less the same categorisations of language learning strategies. The classification provided by Oxford (1990), the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), provides a useful base to understand the use of language learning strategies by learners, and has been used extensively by researchers who conducted investigations similar to this investigation, in South African conditions (Dreyer, 2000; Mahlobo, 1998; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a).

In the next section I will provide a brief overview of the LLS classifications by Rubin (1975), O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazaneres, Kupper and Russo (1985), and then also the classification by Oxford (1990).

### **2.2.1.1 System related to successful language learners (Rubin)**

In her attempt to establish what good language learners do to make them more successful than other language learners, Rubin (1975) identified strategies used by the more successful or good language learners and then classified language learning strategies in the following way:

#### *(i) Strategies that directly affect learning*

- Clarification / verification: student asks for an example of how to use the language
- Monitoring: student corrects own language errors
- Guessing: student guesses meaning from key information pieces
- Deductive reasoning: student compares native language to target language
- Practice: student experiments with new information, tries to imitate what has been heard

#### *(ii) Processes that contribute indirectly to learning*

- Creates opportunity for practice: student initiates conversation in target language, listens to radio and TV
- Production tricks: student uses circumlocutions and synonyms, student contextualises to clarify meaning

Rubin based her classification on a wide range of data collected through classroom observation, small-group observation and the analysis of self-reports provided by students describing what they did to learn a new language (Rubin, 1975; Brown, 1994).

### **2.2.1.2 System based on psychological functions (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper & Russo)**

O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper and Russo (1985:582-584) frame their studies on second language acquisition and language learning strategy use within cognitive theory with its essential assumption that human beings process information and that learning involves such information processing. They suggest the following classification of Language Learning Strategies:

- #### *(i) Cognitive strategies*
- involve interaction with the learning materials through mental or physical manipulation or applying a specific technique to a learning task. These would include repetition of a chunk of language, grouping through ordering or classification, note-taking of key concepts, deduction to understand new information, summarising language information, translating ideas from one language to another and inferencing to fill in missing language information.

(ii) *Metacognitive* strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning the process, monitoring the process and finally evaluating the process by establishing how much language has been learnt. These would include actions such as planning and organising a learning task, focussing attention on relevant information in a task, self-management during the execution of the language learning task, self-monitoring of progress on the language learning task, problem identification and self-evaluation both during and at the end of the language task.

(iii) *Social and affective* strategies would involve interaction with another person or other people to assist language learning. These would include questioning for clarification of the language matter being investigated, cooperation with classroom peers to solve a language problem or get feedback on performance, self-talk to reduce performance anxiety and self-reinforcement for personal motivation.

### **2.2.1.3 System based on the use of direct and indirect strategies (Oxford)**

A contemporary of O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper & Russo (mentioned above) on research into language learning strategies, Rebecca Oxford, classified LLSs as direct and indirect. Oxford (1990:16-22 & 2002:167) further divides these direct and indirect language learning strategies (LLSs) into six categories:

(i) *Cognitive Strategies*: which help learners form associations between new and known information and facilitate the mental restructuring of information. Examples would include guessing from context, analysing, inductive and deductive reasoning and reorganising information.

(ii) *Mnemonic Strategies*: Learners use these to link a new item with a known item and they are useful in memorising information in an orderly pattern (e.g. acronyms). Examples of these strategies include sounds (e.g. rhyming), body movement and the locus technique (location supports the association). These strategies are very similar to cognitive strategies as described above, but associations are not as deep and rather simplistic as one would find in stimulus-response behaviouristic connections.

(iii) *Meta-cognitive Strategies* involve the management skills learners use – managing themselves and the learning process (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Managing the self would require self-knowledge (e.g. what learning methods are preferred) and managing the learning process would require knowledge of the available resources to facilitate learning (e.g. drawing up a study timetable and finding a good library).



(iv) *Compensatory Strategies for speaking and writing* which are similar to the guessing strategy mentioned under cognitive strategies above as they make up for missing knowledge when oral and written English is used. Oxford (1990) states that compensatory strategies are intended for language use, but they simultaneously aid language learning, although it might be considered incidental learning.

(v) *Affective Strategies* include the individual learner's identification of his feelings in certain learning situations. A language diary could be used to note the different feelings in different learning situations. These strategies could be gender and culture based since the recognition of feelings is not always encouraged in all cultures. Using affective strategies to overcome language anxiety and negative beliefs about language can enhance the effectiveness of language learning.

(vi) *Social Strategies* facilitate learning with other people and assist in acquiring the cultural knowledge which is part of a language. These are crucial for communicative language learning so that learners acquire knowledge of language use appropriate to certain situations.

Oxford's classification above has two primary strategy orientations: a *direct learning orientation*, consisting of memory, cognitive, and linguistic deficiency compensation strategies, and an *indirect learning orientation*, consisting of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Direct learning orientation strategies involve the identification, retention, storage, or retrieval of words, phrases, and other elements of the target language. Indirect strategies concern the management of the learning process and include activities such as needs assessment, activities planning and monitoring, and outcome evaluation. Indirect strategies also involve aspects that aid the learner in regulating emotions, motivation, and attitudes. These include routines for self-encouragement and the reduction of anxiety, and those which address the actions learners take in order to communicate with others, such as asking questions for clarification and cooperating with others in communication.

Each of these six strategy groups can be further subdivided, with the end result being a compendium of 62 specific strategies (Oxford, 1990:16). Oxford's model outlines a comprehensive, multi-levelled, and theoretically well-conceived taxonomy of language learning strategies. This taxonomy usefully encompasses a continuum of strategies, from affective personal management and general approaches to basic learning extending to specific language learning, memory, and communicative techniques.

The O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazaneres, Kupper and Russo (1985) and Oxford (1990) classifications are very similar in the identification of the micro Language Learning

Strategies, with Oxford providing a more detailed grouping system of the Language Learning Strategies. This investigation draws on the Oxford approach and Oxford's language learning strategy inventory was used for data generation purposes since much research similar to this investigation has been carried out successfully using the SILL (Mahlobo, 1999; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a).

#### **2.2.1.4 Summary**

A change over time can be noted in these classifications: where the early focus (Rubin, 1975) was on the product of Language Learning Strategies (linguistic or sociolinguistic competence), there is now a greater emphasis on the processes and the characteristics of Language Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990). It is important to mention at this stage that Language Learning Strategies are not to be confused with learning styles: these referring to a learner's consistent and enduring traits, tendencies or preferences that may differentiate him from another learner (Brown, 1994). There does, however, appear to be a relationship between a learner's learning style and the learning strategies employed by that learner (Brown, 1994; Dreyer, 2000).

#### **2.2.2 Why LLSs are important for EFL Learning and Teaching**

As noted by Griffiths and Parr (2001) many different approaches to and methods of language teaching and learning have been used by language teachers and learners – both for learning a mother tongue and learning a second or foreign language (e.g. the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual method, the communicative approach).

Language learning strategies are increasingly attracting the interest of language educators because of their perceived ability to enhance language learning (Dreyer, 2000; Green & Oxford, 1995; Janzen, 2002; Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003; Oxford, 1990). This would be a good time to have a look at the various other language learning theories, approaches and methods from which language learning strategy theory developed.

The grammar-translation method relied heavily on the teaching of grammar and the practicing of translation as its main teaching and learning activities (Richards, 2002). The main focus of the method was on reading and writing with very little attention to speaking and listening. Vocabulary was taught in lists and high priority was given to accuracy and the ability to construct correct sentences.

The audio-lingual method grew from frustration experienced with the limitations of the grammar-translation method, but also from war-time demands to teach soldiers German, Italian and Japanese; Richards and Rodgers (1986) note that by the sixties, audio-lingualism



was widely used. The audio-lingual method, in direct contrast to the grammar-translation method, focused on speaking and listening as the most important language skills (Richards, 2002). This method of language teaching and learning relied on drills and repetition justified according to behaviourist theories that language is a system of habits to be taught and learnt according to stimulus, response and reinforcement. Behaviourists believed these controlled all human learning, also language learning (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992). Unfortunately audio-lingual theory relied on the automatic patterning of behaviour and little recognition was given to any conscious contributions by the language learner. By the end of the sixties language learners were no longer content with the audio-lingual method as they wanted to translate the language, sought grammar rules and were not content with merely repeating language items. It is at this time that researchers such as Rubin (1975) and Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco (1978) presented their research on language learning strategies and research in this field has expanded dramatically since then. The use of language learning strategies seemed to afford learners more individual freedom in the language learning process.

With regard to especially the older methods mentioned above (grammar-translation and audio-lingual) Finney (2002:1) notes that it has become clear that it is no longer enough to teach merely the structures and rules of a language. Language is communication and teachers need to facilitate their learners' development of communication in a wide range of professional and social contexts: LLSs are believed to assist learners in this quest for communicative competence. As Oxford (1990:1) says: (LLSs) "...are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is important for developing communicative competence". Language learning strategies are, however, not to be confused with communication strategies: these are used by speakers intentionally and consciously in order to cope with difficulties in communicating in a target language (Bialystok, 1990). The term LLSs is wider, containing all strategies that target language learners use in learning the target language, and communication strategies could therefore be regarded a type of Language Learning Strategy. Language learning strategies furthermore move away from a teacher-centred method of language learning to a more learner-centred method (Oxford, 1990). A learner-centred and learning-centred approach to learning (which includes language learning) is strongly supported by Carl Rodgers:

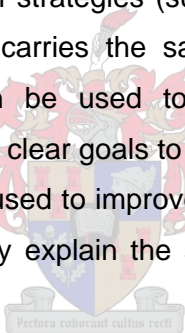
We are, in my view, faced with an entirely new situation in education where the goal of education, if we are to survive, is the *facilitation of change and learning*. The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt to change; the man who has realised that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of *seeking* knowledge gives a basis for security.

Changingness, a reliance on *process* rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes sense as a goal for education in the modern world (Rodgers, 1983:120).

From the above, it is clear that LLSs are crucial to a successful EFL curriculum in particular, and to any language learning environment in general, to develop learners' communicative competence in the target language. The current focus in language learning is on learner and situation centredness, and not on teacher-centredness as was the case in traditional learning settings, and learners thus need the tools to be able to direct their own learning: language learning strategies provide these tools.

### 2.2.3 Different LLSs for different language skills

Successful language learners tend to select strategies that work well together in a highly orchestrated way, tailored to the requirements of the language task (Chamot & Kupper, 1989). Social strategies (such as asking questions and communicating with other speakers of the language) and compensation strategies (such as trying to guess unfamiliar words in English and using a phrase that carries the same meaning if one cannot think of the appropriate word in English) can be used to develop speaking and listening skills. Metacognitive skills (such as setting clear goals to improve one's English, planning a learning schedule, and self-monitoring) are used to improve writing skills (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989:34). These learners can generally easily explain the strategies they use and why they employ them (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).



Learners use different LLSs in each of the four different language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing. For listening comprehension a learner would, for example, use the LLS of inferencing while listening to a conversation to make logical guesses where his language knowledge is insufficient. While speaking, the same student could make use of the LLS of substitution (with synonyms or paraphrasing) to assist the communication process where insufficient language ability exists. For reading comprehension this student could make use of the LLS of elaboration (using prior knowledge) to assist his comprehension of the text (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 2002; Valdés, 2001). Writing, for example benefits from the learning strategies of planning, self-monitoring, deduction, and substitution. L2 speaking demands strategies such as risk-taking, paraphrasing, circumlocution, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.

Cognitive (e.g. translating, analysing) and metacognitive (e.g. planning, organising) strategies are often used together, supporting each other (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Well tailored combinations of strategies often have more impact than single strategies. Learners

at different levels of language acquisition have also been found to employ different language learning strategies according to their abilities at that level of language proficiency.

## 2.2.4 Summary

Language Learning Strategies have been classified in different ways by different researchers, but the classification by Rebecca Oxford (1990) seems to be the most widely used currently. From her classification of strategies followed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL (refer to 2.3) for students to assess their use of language learning strategies. This instrument serves both to make students aware of their ways of learning, but also to inform teachers and researchers of the ways in which different students reportedly learn. The SILL has been widely used in research on the relationship between LLS use and language proficiency (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Dreyer, 2000; Green & Oxford, 1995; Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003; Mahlobo, 1999; O'Malley & Chamot, 1995; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a). Research indicates that different LLSs are employed for the learning of different aspects of language use and that successful language learners make use of a combination of language learning strategies which are suitable to their preferences and needs at the time of learning (Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003).

## 2.3 The STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL)

Rebecca Oxford developed the SILL, a Likert-scaled, self-report instrument that assesses the frequency with which the respondent uses a variety of different strategies to learn a language. Strategy descriptions on the SILL were taken from a comprehensive taxonomy of language learning strategies that systematically cover the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing (Oxford, 1990: 293-296; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a:130).

The SILL covers sixty-two separate strategies subdivided into 19 strategy sets, which are grouped into six strategy sections, and each section represents a particular group of strategies as set out in table 2.1 (Brown, 1994:202; Oxford, 1990:16). The validity and reliability of the SILL have been established (Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995b:310).

**Table 2.1 Description of the sections of the SILL**

Section	Group	Strategy function
A	Memory strategies	Remembering more effectively
B	Cognitive strategies	Using all mental processes
C	Compensation strategies	Compensating for missing knowledge
D	Metacognitive strategies	Organising and evaluating one's own learning
E	Affective strategies	Managing one's emotions
F	Social strategies	Learning with others

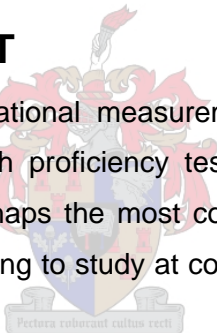
Source: Oxford (1990:16-17 & 293-296)

The strategies in sections A-C are direct strategies and involve the mental processing of the target language (English in this study), while sections D-F contain indirect strategies which support the learning process.

The SILL was field-tested at the Defence Language Institute in Monterey, California in November 1995. Oxford and an independent language expert conducted a content validity assessment of the SILL and they found it adequately and fairly represented the range of potential learning strategies. Concurrent and construct validity can be assumed based on the demonstration of strong relationships between SILL factors and self-ratings of language proficiency and language motivation as reported in Oxford and Nyikos (1989). The reliability of the SILL was assessed using Cronbach's alpha on the field test data, the internal consistency reliability was 0.95 based on the DLI test sample and 0.96 based on a 1200 person university sample (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a:130).

## **2.4 THE INSTITUTIONAL PAPER-BASED TOEFL PROFICIENCY TEST**

The North American private educational measurement organisation, Educational Testing Service (ETS), has various English proficiency tests, of which the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is perhaps the most commonly used worldwide. Most people who take the TOEFL test are planning to study at colleges and universities where instruction is in English.



Each form of the current paper-based TOEFL test consists of three separately-timed sections. The questions in each section are multiple-choice and each question has four options. Answers on multiple-choice paper sheets are computer scored. The total test time is approximately 150 minutes. Language specialists prepare TOEFL test materials according to overall guidelines for test content as specified by the TOEFL Committee of Examiners. All items are reviewed for cultural bias and content appropriateness according to established ETS procedures. The TOEFL test has its focus on American English and this could be a weakness when used in a country where British English is predominant (as in South Africa). A strength of the TOEFL test is that it is available all over the world, thus making comparison of English proficiency more reliable.

### Section 1: Listening and comprehension

Here the ability to understand English as it is spoken in North America is measured. Oral features of the language are stressed and the items tested include vocabulary and idiomatic

expression as well as frequently used grammatical constructions in spoken English. The stimulus material and oral questions are recorded in standard North American English.

### Section 2: Structure and written expression

This section measures the recognition of selected structural and grammatical points in standard, formal written North American English. Topics of sentences are of a general academic nature to avoid discrimination and particular advantage to certain groups.

### Section 3: Reading comprehension

The ability to read and understand short passages that are similar in topic and style to what North American students would encounter in tertiary studies, is measured. Test participants read a variety of short passages on academic subjects and answer a few questions about each passage. Questions test information stated or implied, as well as knowledge of some specific words used in the passage. (<http://www.ets.org>) (download date 4 July 2004)

**Table 2.2 Explanation of the paper-based TOEFL score ranges**

ETS Test and Test Section	Score Range	Scale	B1 Score	Minimum	C1 Score	Minimum
TOEFL PBT Total	310 – 677		457		560	
TOEFL PBT Listening	31 – 68		46		56	
TOEFL PBT Reading	31 – 67		46		56	
TOEFL PBT Structure	31 – 68		45		56	

Source: (<http://www.ets.org>)

As indicated in the above table, this test has a score scale range of 310-677 and although the Educational Testing Service (ETS) regards a CI (Effective Operational Proficiency Level) score of a minimum of 560 necessary for admission to tertiary studies through the medium of English, Stellenbosch University deems a prospective student with a minimum score of 550 on this test to have sufficient proficiency in English to pursue post-graduate studies through the medium of English. ETS research indicates that a student with a minimum CI score of 560 can be regarded to have the following skills:

- the ability to understand a wide range of demanding texts, recognising implicit meaning,
- the ability to express himself fluently,

- the ability to use English language effectively for social, academic and professional purposes,
  - the ability to produce succinct, well-constructed, detailed text on complex subjects, using controlled organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive constructions.
- (<http://www.ets.org>) (download date 4 July 2004).

With particular reference to the language skills of listening and reading, ETS have found that a CI score of 56 on both Listening and Reading would be adequate English proficiency in those language skills to enable a person to complete tertiary studies through the medium of English. A student with a CI minimum of 56 is regarded to have the following abilities with regard to Listening:

- can understand enough English to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his field of study,
- can recognise a wide range of idiomatic English expressions,
- can follow extended speech even if it is not structured,
- can easily follow complex interactions between parties in group discussions.

A student with a CI minimum of 56 is regarded to have the following abilities with regard to Reading:

- can understand detail in lengthy, complex text even in reading materials unrelated to his field of study/specialisation,
  - can understand in detail a wide range of lengthy, complex texts in social, professional and academic context and identify finer points and hidden implications.
- (<http://www.ets.org>) (download date 4 July 2004).

It is very important to mention that this TOEFL test did not test for proficiency in writing and speaking, but only for reading and listening. The test is by no means considered to be a reflection of the test takers' complete English language proficiency. The test is also constructed in an American context which could impact unfavourably on students who are not familiar with their culture and context. However, it is widely used because it is a standardised instrument which is regarded as having a high degree of validity and reliability.

## **2.5 RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LLS USE AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

To date much of the LLS research appears to be based in North America and is largely oriented towards quantitative data and descriptions (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). A few studies on the relationship between LLS use and language proficiency have also been done in South Africa (Dreyer, 2000; Kamper et al, 2003; Van der



Walt & Dreyer, 1995a). The South African studies used the Oxford (1990) SILL questionnaire and language proficiency tests to establish a positive relationship between LLS use and language proficiency and triangulated information through interviews with individual participants after completion of the questionnaires as well as through classroom observations and teacher interviews on their perceptions of how students used LLS.

Research indicates the growing interest in the role of learning styles and learning strategies in the language teaching and learning process (Dreyer, 2000; Kamper et al, 2003; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995) as language learning currently embraces a flexible learner-centred model (Finney, 2002). In this learner-centred approach, language learning strategies have been found to be reliable indicators of how learners approach tasks during the language learning process. Although LLSs are often non-observable and used unconsciously (e.g. the cognitive strategies of "receiving and sending messages" and "creating structure for input and output"), all learners employ some degree of LLS. Even if learners are not aware of all the LLSs they employ, they will be able to report the use of some LLSs which they are aware of and this information can supply teachers with valuable information on how their students assess a situation, plan to understand, learn, or remember new input presented in the language classroom.

Research into second language acquisition has since the 1970s, shifted from investigating methods of teaching to investigating language learning processes and this has resulted in numerous research studies investigating the relationship between learner strategy use and the products of second language acquisition (Dreyer, 2000; Mahlobo, 1998; Purpura, 1997). Many of these studies investigated the cognitive factors underlying the differential behaviour of successful versus unsuccessful language learners (O'Malley et al, 1985; Oxford, 1990). A few studies have indicated a positive correlation between LLS use and language proficiency as measured by test performance.

Furthermore, various studies have indicated that there is a positive relationship between language learning strategies and the different levels of language proficiency of students (Dreyer, 2002; Green & Oxford, 1995; Kamper et al, 2003; Phakiti, 2003, Purpura, 1997). In most of these studies more proficient language learners reported higher LLS use (Dreyer, 2000; Kamper et al, 2003) and more proficient language learners generally used a greater variety of LLSs more often (Dreyer, 2000; Kamper et al, 2003; Purpura, 1997).

Most research into the relationship between LLS use and language proficiency rely on subjects self-reporting on their LLS usage and the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is often used (Dreyer, 2000; Kamper et al, 2003).

Oxford and Ehrman (1995) also researched learner factors that influence the choice of strategies used by students learning a new language and the following is a brief summary of their findings:

Motivation: More motivated students tended to use more strategies than less motivated students, and the particular reason for studying the language (motivational orientation, especially as related to career field) was important in the choice of strategies. This is an important learner factor which also surfaced in this investigation.

Gender: Females reported greater overall strategy use than males in most studies, although sometimes males surpassed females in the use of a particular strategy (as also indicated by Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

Cultural background: Rote memorisation and other forms of memorisation were more prevalent among some Asian students than among students from other cultural backgrounds. Certain cultures appeared to encourage this strategy among learners. These findings are supported by Yongqi Gu (2003:74).

Attitudes and beliefs: These were reported to have a profound effect on the strategies learners choose, with negative attitudes and beliefs often causing poor strategy use or lack of orchestration of strategies.

Type of task: The nature of the task helped determine the strategies naturally employed by most learners to carry out the task.

Age and L2 stage: Students of different ages and stages of L2 learning used different strategies, with certain strategies often being employed by older or more advanced students.

Learning style: Learning style (general approach to language learning) often determined the choice of L2 learning strategies. For example, analytic-style students preferred strategies such as contrastive analysis, rule-learning, and dissecting words and phrases, while global students used strategies to find meaning (guessing, scanning, predicting) and to converse without knowing all the words (paraphrasing, gesturing).

Tolerance of ambiguity: Students who were more tolerant of ambiguity used significantly different learning strategies in some instances than did students who were less tolerant of ambiguity.



## 2.6 TEACHING LLSs IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

### 2.6.1 Introduction

Various researchers have established a relationship between effective and extensive language learning strategy use and English language proficiency (Dreyer, 2000; Green & Oxford, 1995; Kamper et al, 2003, Oxford, 1990; Phakiti, 2003). Researchers like Nunan (2002), Janzen (2002) and Johnson (1999) have done research on the effectiveness of introducing language learning strategies in the language classroom to improve language proficiency. All of them found that including various LLSs (directly or indirectly) in the language curriculum and language classroom, helped improve the language proficiency of the learners.

### 2.6.2 Research

What is the nature and extent of research that indicated a positive link between LLS inclusion in the language curriculum and improved language proficiency of learners? According to various researchers (Green & Oxford, 1995; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo & Kupper, 1985; Oxford, 1990 & 2002) language learning strategies can be taught successfully and the positive effects of strategy instruction have been proven with regard to all four the language skills and more specifically with regard to listening proficiency (Johnson, 1999; O'Malley et al, 1985) and reading proficiency (Janzen, 2002; O'Malley et al, 1985; Oxford, 2002).

An ESL training study by O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo and Kupper (1985) investigated the effective implementation of learning strategy instruction in the ESL classroom. The primary objective of the study was to find out whether foreign language teachers would be able and willing to integrate learning strategy instruction into their language classes. Participating teachers were given a training workshop on LLSs and they then chose which LLSs they wanted to teach to each of the classes participating in the study.

The principal strategies taught for listening comprehension were: *selective attention* (the teacher told the students to focus on specific items such as word groups), *elaboration* (the teacher pointed out what the students already knew and indicated how this could be used to infer new meaning), *inferencing* (the teacher first focussed on other strategies such as elaboration, transfer and deduction and then suggested students make inferences based on information elicited from these strategies) and *transfer* (the teacher pointed out the similarities between words in different languages if one considers the Latin root).

The principal strategies taught for reading comprehension were: *inferencing* (guessing the meaning of new words), *deduction* (applying grammar rules to identify the form of an unknown word), *elaboration* (teacher encouraged student use of prior knowledge to make decisions about probable meanings), *transfer* (teacher elicited from students recognition of cognates and similar-sounding words in the mother-tongue that could be applied to understanding new words in the foreign language. As can be seen from the above, the strategies selected for reading and listening instruction by the different teachers were quite similar.

The importance of motivation in learning strategy teaching was clearly shown in this study – students in classes where the teachers successfully implemented learning strategy teaching engaged in activities with enthusiasm. In one case a teacher stopped all attempts at learning strategy teaching when students were indifferent to any language learning. The will to learn appears to be essential to the development of the skill to learn (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Paris, 1988; Svanes, 1987).

The study further concluded that learning strategy training is more successful when integrated with regular classroom instruction so that teachers could demonstrate to students the specific applications of the strategies. The study also found that attempts at learning strategy training were more successful when students were made aware of the strategies they were being taught – as opposed to the approach of embedding strategies. It is believed that this metacognitive knowledge of learning strategies will facilitate the transfer of strategy use to new language learning tasks (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Research on strategy instruction has also investigated the instructional sequences used by language instructors (not researchers) to implement strategy instruction into foreign language lessons. One of the research interests of Chamot et al. (1990) was to discover how three regular classroom teachers actually integrated strategy instruction into their Spanish and Russian foreign language class activities. The results showed that although 'each participating instructor had an individual way of providing learning strategy instruction' (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995), all three instructors opted for direct instruction (informing students of the purpose and value of strategies) and followed a structured sequence of introducing, practicing, reinforcing and evaluating strategy use for each language activity.

### 2.6.3 The Learning Outcomes of Strategy Instruction

Language learning strategy instruction is a teaching approach that aims to raise learner awareness of learning strategies and provide learners with systematic practice, reinforcement and self-monitoring of their strategy use while attending to language learning activities.

The underlying assumption of strategy instruction is, if learners explore 'how', 'when' and 'why' to use language learning strategies, and evaluate and monitor their own learning (Cohen, 1998: 69), then they can take a more active role in the language learning process. In becoming active participants in the learning process, learners should become more efficient and positive in their approach to learning. Through this learning approach a learner's knowledge of learning strategies becomes procedural (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), resulting in an effect on motivation levels, self-efficacy, learner autonomy, and transfer skills which should result in greater language proficiency.

In principle, language learning strategy instruction and use can be undertaken at any language proficiency level, in any number of forms, including both general and specific language learning skills objectives (Oxford, 1990 & 2002). Two important issues to consider in the instruction and use of such strategies are the degree of integration into the existing curriculum versus the degree of detachment from the current curriculum and also the level of learner control. The degree of integration of learning strategies into the existing curriculum can be conceptualised as reflecting a continuum which extends from fully integrated, curriculum-based programmes to detached, skill-specific instruction with near autonomous use by the learner. Several fully integrated curriculum-based language learning strategies instructional approaches have been developed (Cohen, 1998; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). However, one of the most important factors in successful strategy instruction depends on how the need, usefulness, and benefits of a given strategy are emphasised along with a focus on direct, explicit instruction. The strategies which learners make the most use of and those which yield the most benefit are not necessarily those which reflect the best fit in terms of the learning objectives. Those which prove popular with students and bring tangible results are ones readily adapted to their learning level and disposition.

The adoption of fully instructional curriculum models with integrated strategies would require teachers to adjust and undergo a conceptual shift toward a learner-centred classroom, making the necessary adjustments in their existing curriculum, and learning the specific techniques of language learning strategies and instruction. They need to accept the problematic element of uncertainty inherent in curriculum change. Unfortunately teachers are often uncomfortable with making such changes and thus ignore or resist introducing

learning strategies (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). The idea of a teacher-centred learning situation has been very deeply entrenched over the past centuries.

#### **2.6.4 Suggestions on how to integrate LLS use into Language Lessons**

Learning Strategy instruction can be direct (inform learners of the value and purpose of learning strategies and help learners to use, identify and develop learning strategies in a systematic way as they learn the target language) or indirect (where students work through materials and activities designed to elicit the use of specific strategies, but are not informed of the name, purpose or value of the specific learning strategy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995:153). In the direct approach to language learning strategy instruction, the teacher raises learner awareness of the purpose and rationale for strategy use, identifies the specific strategy being used, and systematically provides opportunities for practice and self-evaluation (Oxford, 1990:170; Wenden, 1987:159). Through this direct and integrated approach to language learning strategy instruction learners become reactive learners as they increase their awareness, practice, use and monitoring of the language learning strategies they are using while learning a second or foreign language. The learner outcome is an efficient learner who has developed the skills to successfully organise and conduct his own learning events (Wenden, 1987:11). To assist students in learning the target language optimally, curricula would have to focus systematically (Oxford, 1990: 170) on raising students' awareness of language learning strategies, to highlight the relationship between strategy use and language learning tasks, and to methodically increase students' existing repertoire of language learning strategies.

The most common form of uninformed strategy instruction is a textbook rubric, for example: 'In pairs, discuss the following statement'. These rubrics assume that learners will identify and use the appropriate metacognitive, memory and social strategies. The cues for learners to use specific strategies such as self-monitoring, memorising and co-operation respectively are embedded in these textbook rubrics (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995). The assumptions underlying uninformed strategy instruction are that learners will learn to use the language learning strategy cued by the material and activities presented in textbook rubrics (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995). According to Wenden (1987) the drawbacks of such an approach would include the possibility of the learners not understanding the textbook instruction and thus not even getting to the point of developing a learning strategy. Learners will also not learn which learning strategy to employ under which conditions, which means that the knowledge of which learning strategy to use when will also not be transferred to new situations when learning the target language.

Resources available for LLS instruction consist of two kinds: published materials designed to teach learning strategies (e.g. Oxford, 1990); and language learning strategies presented in textbooks. The embedded strategies in textbook activities are useful instructional resources to integrate strategy instruction into regular language classes. As instructional resources, these embedded strategies can be identified, modelled and explained by teachers and practised, monitored and self-evaluated by students while they are learning the target language.

Before making any decision on a direct approach versus an indirect approach to the teaching of LLSs and which materials to employ, teachers should study their teaching context, paying special attention to their students, and their own teaching. Any training programme must relate closely to the particular students involved, their interests, motivations, and learning style preferences. Observation of their behaviour in class might reveal which LLSs they already appear to be using. However, self-report questionnaires for learners seems to be a more effective way of gaining information. The teacher can compile a short questionnaire on LLSs and related factors such as motivation that students can fill in at the beginning of a course. It seems too that informal conversations with students outside of class times can also provide useful information about students, their goals, motivations, and LLSs, and their understanding of the particular course being taught (Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a).

From previous research (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995; Oxford, 1990, 2001 & 2002; Phakiti, 2003; Valdés, 2001; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a; Wenden, 1987) some suggestions on the practical implementation of LLS use in the EFL classroom could include the following:

- Integrate LLS training into target language activities over a longer period (e.g. a course of a few weeks) of time rather than attempting separate, short intervention teaching periods (e.g. one lesson).
- Base LLS training on students' needs – determine their attitudes, beliefs, and needs as expressed by themselves and determined through teacher observation.
- Choose LLSs to fit the requirements of the language task, the learners' goals, and the learners' styles of learning.
- Include explanations, handouts, activities, brainstorming, and materials for reference and home study in LLS training.
- Include a variety of LLSs, attempting to place equal emphasis on cognitive, metacognitive and affective strategies.
- Provide students with ample opportunities for strategy training during language classes.
- Address learner factors such as anxiety, motivation, beliefs, and interests directly for these impact on strategy choice and use.

- Provide students with mechanisms to evaluate their own progress, evaluate the success of the training and to determine the value of the strategies in multiple tasks.
- Introduce LLS training in such a way that students will be able to transfer LLSs to future language tasks outside the formal classroom.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided background information to issues of importance in this investigation:

It highlights the positive correlation between Language Learning Strategy use and Language Proficiency, which would imply that learners of a new language need to be able to employ LLSs to optimise their learning of a new language.

Based on previous research, it provides some pointers on how to include LLS teaching in a language learning curriculum.

Following from these reflections, future research on LLS use in L2 acquisition should consider and include curriculum development and materials for LLS training which takes into account the needs of specifically adult EFL learners and their learning styles and motivations when learning a new language. While Chamot and O'Malley (1995) have developed materials for content-based school classes, it is important to consider the development and use of materials for university language classes, especially in EFL settings.

The need for further research involves developing a comprehensive theory of LLS for second language learning with the emphasis on English language learning that is also relevant to language teaching practice. Moving beyond taxonomies of LLSs, various types of studies into LLS use and training must consider a wide range of questions, such as: which LLSs work best with which learners in which contexts; what is the role of language proficiency in LLS use and training, how long does it take to train specific types (level of proficiency) of learners in certain LLSs; which LLSs should be taught at different proficiency levels; are specific LLSs learnt more easily in classroom or non-classroom settings; and how can one best assess success in LLS use or training?



## CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore different approaches to research in the field of education, focusing on the approaches to research which seemed appropriate for an investigation into the possible link between language learning strategy use and the development of language proficiency in a non-mother tongue. It will also provide the rationale for the research paradigm and design I chose for this investigation, as well as the methods chosen to generate data to explore research questions relating to whether there is a link between Language Learning Strategy use and performance on a standardised English proficiency test, and whether inclusion of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) in EFL and ESL curricula could improve English proficiency. Other aspects discussed are data generation, methods of data analysis, ethical considerations as well as validity and reliability.

The research process may be divided into five phases: determining the research question, designing or planning the research, generating the data, interpreting the data and finally reporting on the research. When planning research, and based on the research question, the researcher should draw up a plan or research design of the intended study and then according to the plan, decide on the most suitable research methodology to follow in order to determine which methods should be used for data generation. As Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:30) state, the research design is a bridge between the research question and the execution of the research. A good research design will provide a plan which sets out how the research is going to be done to be able to answer the research question. A researcher working within a quantitative paradigm is unlikely to deviate from this plan, whereas a researcher working within a qualitative paradigm would, more likely than not, have to adjust the plan as the research progresses. In qualitative research the researcher often explores a real-life situation without manipulating or controlling any variables as is often done in quantitative research. If variables in the research are not manipulated and controlled, it will invariably mean that the research plan will have to be altered as the generation of data progresses, because the researcher has no means to control the data produced. A *research methodology* may be regarded to be a system of principles guiding the researcher's investigation. The educational researcher is faced with a variety of options and alternatives to choose from when setting up this research design and he must strategically select options most appropriate to the investigation. Each choice made has advantages and disadvantages



and there is no perfect recipe for any research – some choices are just more appropriate to the situation and the investigation, than others. Research in Education is not therefore limited to a specific approach or methodology: methodologically defined research in Education could, for instance, include a range of methodologies such as action research (e.g. applying a different teaching method in a real-time class and measuring the outcome thereof), deliberate inquiry (e.g. asking people their opinion on a given situation and noting their perceptions in order to draw conclusions about the situation later) and discourse analysis (e.g. analysing people's naturally occurring, non-manipulated conversations or written communication in a given context).

Research methodologies inform the research methods to be employed. A *research method* can be said to be a technique used to gather evidence and could include observation of behaviour, listening to informants or examining recorded data (Harding, 1987:2). Although research methods are informed by particular research methodologies, it is important to realise that research methods are not the exclusive domain of one research methodology. A particular methodology can also inspire several different methods of research. There is also not only one way in which a research method can be used, e.g. there are a variety of ways in which to conduct an interview or set up a questionnaire. An interview can for example be in a face-to-face environment or via the telephone. Data generated in the two situations could differ substantially. In the face-to-face interview the interviewer will make use of perceived body language to add meaning to the data. In the telephone interview the interviewer might be more sensitive to intonation, tone, loudness and other aspects of pronunciation which could add additional meaning to the words spoken by the interviewee. Questionnaires also vary greatly. Questions can for example be open-ended (where the interviewee can produce any answer) or closed (where the interviewee is asked to select an answer from a list provided by the interviewer). Closed questions are particularly useful for quantitative research since they provide a greater uniformity of response and are thus easier to process. Open-ended questions provide a more detailed picture of a situation since there will most probably be responses from interviewees that the researcher had not thought of. These are admittedly a little more intricate to process and present in a credible way.

## **3.2 RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH**

This investigation had three objectives (refer to 1.3).

- Firstly, to gain insight into the patterns of LLS use of different individuals, and how they reportedly use the strategies.
- Secondly, to learn more about how LLS use differs in different situations and with individuals from different backgrounds in order to learn more about factors which

could possibly have an influence on the use (or non-use) of LLS in the language learning environment.

- Thirdly, to determine (from recent international and South African empirical research on the relationship between Language Learning Strategy (LLS) use and good scores on English proficiency tests and from knowledge gained in this investigation) which LLSs and other factors underlie successful performance in English language proficiency assessments so that the EFL curriculum at Stellenbosch University can be adapted to include instruction in the LLSs that seem to promote success.

### **3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research set out to explore the relationship between language learning strategies and effective language production as measured in a standardised test of language proficiency (TOEFL) in a group of 7 students. This broad research problem can be further broken down into the following questions:

1. What complex of language learning strategies is used by each of the learners, and how were the strategies used?
2. What similarities and differences are there (in the language learning strategies they use) between the German, Korean and Gabonese students and between male and female students?
3. What factors seem to underlie successful English language performance (a score of 550 or more in the TOEFL test)?
4. What changes should be made to the English language (EFL) courses for international students at Stellenbosch University?

### **3.4 SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION**

As stated in 1.4, this investigation was initially limited to particular students who participated in the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University's International Office in 2004 and who voluntarily took the TOEFL English proficiency test in July 2004. As the investigation progressed and information unfolded during the generation of data, focus group interviews were held with other Gabonese students enrolled at Stellenbosch University and with teachers who worked with International students who studied English at Stellenbosch University so that I could enrich the data obtained from the initial participants in the investigation.

### 3.4.1 The participants/informants

The initial seven participants in this investigation [who took the TOEFL test and voluntarily completed the SILL (Oxford, 1990)] were non-South African adult learners who studied English full-time for one year at Stellenbosch University's International Office to prepare for admission to graduate (at CPUT) and post-graduate studies (at Stellenbosch University). 22 Gabonese students who were in an EFL teacher education programme at Stellenbosch University from February to October 2006 were used to enrich the data obtained from the original seven participants. Teachers of all the afore-mentioned participants were interviewed for further enrichment of data obtained from the participants.

The majority of the EFL students who took the TOEFL test in July 2004 were Gabonese students who had been compelled to do the English programme in order to gain admission to postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University and undergraduate studies at CPUT. Of the 13 students who took the TOEFL test in July 2004, only 7 volunteered to complete the SILL questionnaire (Oxford, 1990), volunteered to let me have their TOEFL scores, have a short interview with me on LLSs and participate in this study. The seven students who agreed to participate in the study were from the following countries: five (4 males and 1 female) from Gabon (TOEFL scores from 410 to 490), one (female) from Germany (TOEFL score = 527) and one (male) from South Korea (TOEFL score = 530). Three (males) of the Gabonese students were preparing for admission to postgraduate courses in physical science related areas of study at Stellenbosch University and the other two Gabonese (one male and one female) were improving their English language skills to gain admission to undergraduate courses at CPUT. The German student planned postgraduate studies in future, but was not going to enrol for such studies immediately. She was very motivated and wanted to feel that she had a good command of the English language for use in all situations – not only in an academic setting. The Korean student had been provisionally admitted to the MTh programme at Stellenbosch University: his final admission was dependent on his successful completion of the EFL programme and obtaining a score of at least 550 on the TOEFL. The interviews with these students were primarily to verify their responses on the SILL (Oxford, 1990).

The 22 Gabonese students (4 females and 18 males) on the EFL teacher education programme at Stellenbosch University in 2006 were all studying towards a qualification to become teachers of English in Gabon. I had focus group interviews with 19 of them in August 2006 to learn more about their culture of learning, and especially language learning. Five of my original group of seven participants were from Gabon and as certain patterns emerged from the data I got from them, I felt the need to further investigate the Gabonese learning situation by involving other Gabonese students who were also trying to improve their

English language skills (although their programme was not primarily aimed at improving their English language skills, but at didactical training) at Stellenbosch University.

### 3.4.2 The researcher

I taught EFL at Stellenbosch University from 1997 to 2004. Prior to teaching English as a foreign language, I taught Xhosa for eight years: as a third (or foreign) language to students at a teacher's training college, students at a university and to numerous professionals in industry. Non-mother tongue learning and the maintenance of what had been learnt has naturally always been of interest to me.

This investigation is my attempt to gain insight into how adult learners go about learning English when they need a fairly high level of proficiency for academic and professional purposes. It is a **critical reflection** on what I experienced with international students who were learning English at Stellenbosch University. Reflection is a social process and therefore influenced by the values, beliefs and attitudes of the researcher and the participants, because any social construction is necessarily dependant on human perception and activity. The objective of this reflection is to firstly learn about the situation and to secondly inform improvement of practice in this situation. I have found that critical reflection helps me make sense of my professional experiences: it leads to the uncovering of my sometimes rigid ideas and biases, and assists me in objectively evaluating and improving my own practice. As Singh (1996:349) states: reflective practitioners integrate their knowledge with the knowledge obtained from others in an attempt to improve their practice.



During my involvement with EFL teaching at Stellenbosch University, I often noted that EFL students were able to do reasonably well in the English class in the sense that they were able to do the grammar exercises and a variety of practical exercises from the text books and teachers' notes in class, but were less successful when using English to do their academic work. They would often bring their written academic work for me to check and sometimes I was really disappointed for it seemed that they were unable to apply what they had learnt in the EFL class to their academic work. For me this was very disappointing and frustrating and I needed to find out how what happens in the EFL class can be changed to ensure that the acquired English language skills would be transferred to all areas of the student's life – more specifically to the student's academic life. I felt intuitively that the way in which the English language had been learnt could have something to do with it. I wanted to find out how I could help students in making the transition from English in the English class to successful English usage in real life; I regard it to be somewhat unethical not to assist students in this transition during the classes, since they enrol for EFL classes at Stellenbosch University primarily to equip themselves for tertiary studies. When my former EFL students do well

academically, I feel I have achieved my personal goal of effectively equipping them to study through the medium of English and that I have contributed to society in a manner which goes beyond teaching someone language skills.

This investigation was thus inspired by my personal commitment to being an investigative, critical, reflective and responsible language practitioner. Darlington and Scott's (2002:18) statement reflects the motivation for my research: "For some qualitative researchers the questions they explore grow out of a strong ideological commitment and the pursuit of social justice."

### **3.4.3 Data generation**

With the assistance of the two groups of participants, a French interpreter, the TOEFL administrator and English teachers, qualitative and quantitative data were generated as set out in this section.

The TOEFL English proficiency test was administered to the seven initial participants in July 2004 and this provided quantitative information with regard to their levels of English proficiency.

A month after the TOEFL test was administered, the results were available and participants were asked to volunteer to complete the SILL questionnaire and have short interviews with the researcher on the SILL questions. The SILL questionnaire was used to generate qualitative data with regard to the participants' language learning strategy use while learning English.

A week after participants completed the SILL the researcher had interviews with the participants to validate their responses on the SILL questionnaire.

In February 2005 a French interpreter and translator was used to translate a questionnaire drawn up by Mahlobo (1999) to validate responses on the SILL and the French interpreter also interviewed three of the Gabonese students using the Mahlobo questionnaire. These interviews were recorded on audio-cassette and transcribed into English by the French interpreter. This qualitative data provided information on the participants' perception of the questions asked in the SILL and also about their perceptions of their language learning strategy use. This was used to ascertain whether the participants understood the English in the SILL questionnaire.

In February 2005 a teacher who taught all of the participants in 2004 was asked to complete the SILL on each participant (their names and TOEFL scores were sent to her electronically), as well as give her own perceptions so that qualitative data could be generated by noting how the teacher perceived each participant's use of language learning strategies in the classroom. After lengthy communication, both electronically and telephonically, the teacher informed me that she would prefer not to complete the SILL for each of the students. However, she was prepared to grant me an interview to give me some of her perceptions on the students while they were in her EFL classes. Unfortunately the teacher was very busy and kept on putting this interview off and it eventually only happened in October 2005. I gave her the questions in writing as a guideline for the interview (refer to addendum A).

After having obtained data from all of the fore-mentioned sources, I noted certain patterns in LLS use, including factors that I was not specifically investigating such as the roles of motivation, cultural background, education, age and gender in language learning. I obtained permission to conduct focus group interviews with a group of 22 Gabonese students who were registered in the Faculty of Education for a non-degree course in teaching English. I chose this group of students, because five of my original participants were Gabonese and I hoped to obtain more data to support themes already found in the LLS use of the group of five Gabonese students. However, only 19 of these were prepared to participate in the focus group interviews which were conducted in August 2006. Their principal teacher at Stellenbosch University further provided valuable information on their culture, educational background, learning preferences and gender-related behaviour.

### 3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

In simple terms, research stems from the desire to explore when you want to find out why things work and how things work. You need a strategic plan to provide structure and order to your work in order to maximise the validity of the research. Researchers commonly refer to this plan as the research design. Babbie and Mouton (1998:74) refer to a research design as "... a plan or blueprint of how you intend conducting the research". Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 33) remind researchers to bear the following in mind when constructing a research design:

- The **purpose** of the research
- The theoretical **paradigm** informing the research
- The **context** within which the research is being carried out
- The research **methods** used for data generation and analysis and interpretation

Below is a Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:31) diagram which I modified slightly to illustrate the interactivity of the four core elements in research design the researcher should



reflect on when developing a research design. These four elements must be compatible to ensure an effective research design.

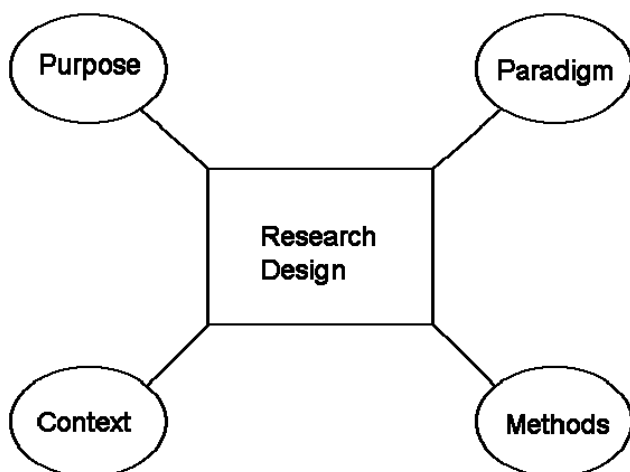


Figure 3.1

When constructing a research design, a researcher must also consider whether the intended research is applied or basic and this can be learnt from the research question(s). Basic research is done when the research question aims to answer a theoretical question important to a certain discipline of study. Applied research is done when the research question aims to answer a practical question that would provide useful decision-making information to someone in a specific situation. Basic research must be generalisable across a wide range of contexts whereas applied research need only be generalised within a specific context in order to assist decision-making with regard to a specific issue. This difference in the desired level of generalisation impacts on research design aspects such as population sampling, observation and measurement (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:41). This investigation involves applied research and the findings are not generalisable: they merely provide a scenario that requires further investigation. The findings could be used in the decision-making process involved in the designing of an EFL curriculum for adult learners who wish to pursue tertiary studies with English as medium of instruction. However, the current findings should preferably be investigated in more depth with a larger sample of participants.

### 3.5.1 Different types of research design

Matters to be investigated and researched differ and thus researchers employ different approaches and methods to conduct research. In what follows, a few approaches will be discussed briefly.

#### 3.5.1.1 Empirical versus non-empirical research

Empirical research can be regarded as research which uses data or specifically collected information to reach conclusions. This is based on the ideas of the philosopher John Locke



(1632-1704) who thought that the only correct way to learn about one's surroundings is to collect sensory facts about it (Locke, 1997).

Some philosophy texts will indicate that the opposite of empiricism is *rationalism*. This is very much a 19<sup>th</sup> century concept bound up with secularism, free thought and the application of the so-called scientific method as the main means of discovering truth. Rationalism results in a non-empirical approach to research which makes no explicit or formal reference to data as such. Non-empirical research results from thinking, reading and contemplation.

In a practical sense, a non-empirical approach to research might involve reviewing a few editions of relevant academic journals to source information about particular projects. Each of those projects might be empirical in approach, but it takes a non-empirical approach to consolidate the information gained and then draw conclusions from it.

This investigation contained a non-empirical element since I did a literature study of research conducted in similar situations to the one I was investigating, but it was primarily empirical in nature since I collected data in an attempt to explain the situation under investigation.

### **3.5.1.2 Qualitative and quantitative approaches to research**

Most researchers make use of quantitative or qualitative research methodologies or a combination of the two. Gorard and Taylor (2004:13) supply very simple and useful definitions of these research methodologies. According to them, quantitative enquiry refers to counts and measures of things to produce data, while qualitative enquiry predominantly uses words and visual imagery for data generation. Both these methodologies have strengths and I believe if the two methodologies are combined to support each other, it produces more valuable research which draws on the strengths of both the approaches – qualitative and quantitative.

In what follows, drawing on insights from Babbie (2002), Babbie and Mouton (1998), Denscombe (1998 & 2002), Gorard and Taylor (2004), Seliger and Shohamy (1990) and Walford (2001), I briefly explore some salient differences between the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research:

In *quantitative* research the aims or anticipated outcomes are established early in the research process and are usually in the form of hypotheses to be tested with the research data generated. These hypotheses remain fixed for the duration of the research. In *qualitative* research the aims are more flexible and are often altered or redesigned as the research progresses, depending on circumstance such as the outcomes at different stages in

the research process; and this is exactly what happened in this investigation. The aims of the research are usually expressed in the form of research questions rather than hypotheses. Research questions usually result in an explanation of a situation rather than a yes/no answer as is mostly the case when testing a hypothesis. As Seliger and Shohamy (1990: 160) state with regard to qualitative research:

The researcher does not determine in advance the exact data that will be sought and may even have only a rough idea of the procedures that will be used, since it is not yet known whether those data even exist.

In *quantitative* research the aim is to test hypotheses. When used in the social sciences, causes of social phenomena are sought as objectively as possible and very likely without regard to the subjective states of individuals under scrutiny. The objective is a summarised, simplified description of reality. In *qualitative* research the focus is on understanding human behaviour from the researcher's frame of reference. Answers to questions are likely to raise new questions to pursue. The objective is an accurate and detailed description of reality (Denscombe, 2002: 98-99).

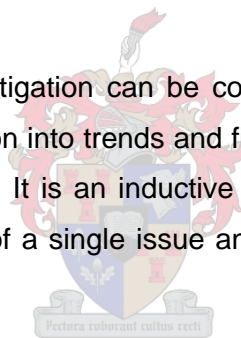
In order to achieve objectivity in *quantitative* research, the setting is likely to be more controlled so that the researcher is able to control any extraneous variables that may impact on the outcome of the research. In *qualitative* research the aim is to observe behaviour in a natural, uncontrolled setting. Research is thus carried out in authentic context rather than in a superficial, controlled setting (Denscombe, 2002: 159).

In *quantitative* research the researcher remains neutral to the process and takes the role of the objective observer or interpreter of research data generated. The researcher remains removed from the data – personal involvement is not permitted. As a result of the evaluative nature of *qualitative* research, the researcher is not objective or neutral, but a key instrument in the research. The researcher's insight, expertise and understanding are important elements in the research process. The researcher is likely to be a participant observer in the research process: research will reflect the interests, values, strengths, characteristics, preferences and biases of the researcher. The researcher becomes part of the data and provides an "insider" perspective, which often results in rich and comprehensive data. The qualitative researcher seeks out patterns or themes which emerge from the data and attempts to provide a descriptive account of reality without manipulating any data or conditions (Denscombe, 2002: 157-159). It is however important that qualitative researchers caution against drawing attention to themselves, so as to limit their influence on the naturally occurring behaviour in the situation being investigated (Johnson & Christensen, 2000:312).

Researchers in the social sciences have in the past relied heavily on the quantitative research methodology and methods used in the natural sciences. More recently they have realised that research related to human behaviour often requires more than the quantitative measurement of behaviour; qualitative research is now being used more frequently in an attempt to understand and explain human behaviour, often in conjunction with quantitative research methods. Examples of research related to this investigation where both quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed in the same area of study, are Dreyer (2000:247-263), Oxford and Ehrman (1995:359-386) and Phakiti (2003:26-56). In these studies the researchers quantitatively determined the relationship between reported LLS use on the SILL (Oxford, 1990) and performance on a standardised English language proficiency test, while they at the same time attempted to gain an understanding of the total situation through qualitative research methods such as observation. This was also my initial approach to this investigation: to combine quantitative and qualitative methods of research. The investigation developed in a way which eventually relied more on qualitative research and data generating methods.

#### **3.5.1.3 Literature study**

A literature study research investigation can be considered to be non-empirical since it is research based on an investigation into trends and findings from various completed research projects – no data is generated. It is an inductive way of reasoning where the researcher takes as sample research texts of a single issue and forms an idea about the research(ed) topic.



This investigation is empirical and not based solely on the study of literature. However, empirical research welcomes literature surveys to provide a framework for the issue under investigation. A literature study provides a summary of the research topic and as noted by various researchers, this is vital in directing any form of research (Babbie & Mouton, 2002, 1998; Denscombe, 1998). This empirical investigation therefore includes a literature study that provides a framework for the investigation and addresses the following objective as set out in 1.3 and 3.2:

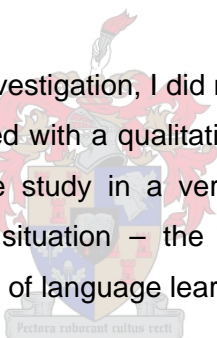
to determine (from recent international and South African empirical research on the relationship between Language Learning Strategy (LLS) use and good scores on English proficiency tests) which LLSs underlie successful performance in English language proficiency assessments so that the EFL curriculum at Stellenbosch University can be adapted to include instruction in the LLSs that seem to promote success.

### 3.5.1.4 Case study

The overall purpose of a case study is to fully understand participants' experiences of a situation and to conduct comprehensive examination through cross-comparison of cases (Mertens, 2005:345). The advantage of using a case study in research is that it focuses on a particular situation and it is a powerful means of portraying a situation to outsiders. In this investigation I wanted to portray a situation to outsiders and a case study was fit for this purpose. Although this investigation is primarily qualitative, it includes minor quantitative aspects. In this case study I generated rich data by employing various data generation methods such as testing, observation, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.

Mertens (2005:345) notes two challenges when using a case study in research: it is usually rather time-consuming to collect, organise and describe; it represents depth of information, rather than breadth and it is therefore difficult if not impossible to generalise based on data obtained through a case study. Earlier, McLeod (1997:99) refers to the unpredictability of case studies when he notes that the researcher does not have much control over the amount or type of data generated.

By choosing a case study for this investigation, I did not rule out the use of research methods which are not traditionally associated with a qualitative case study, such as quantitative test data. I view the concept of case study in a very broad sense, since the goal of this investigation is to learn about a situation – the English language (EFL) classroom at Stellenbosch University and the role of language learning strategies in it.



A case study is a common choice in research where the researcher has limited control over the expected outcome of the research. In my investigation I used a case study within a primarily qualitative research approach in an attempt to understand the language learning environment of students who study English as a further academic language at Stellenbosch University. The data generated from the TOEFL English language proficiency test could be regarded to be quantitative in nature, but this investigation was not intended to be primarily quantitative. I did not therefore focus on the participants themselves, but sought to interpret them within a particular setting. A qualitative researcher considers input from a natural setting (e.g. a classroom or interview) and derives meaning from it in an attempt to gain understanding of a situation and this is what I attempted in this investigation. In this study, my focus was on the experiences and perceptions of the participants with regard to their learning of English both inside and outside the classroom. I did, however, make limited use of a quantitative approach in that I used standardised English test results (as scored on the written TOEFL test) to rank students' English language proficiency. I therefore included analyses of results on a standardised English language test, questionnaires completed by

subjects, interviews with student participants and teachers, as well as focus group interviews with student participants. These methods of data generation were also found to be best suited to this type of investigation by other researchers who did similar research (e.g. Dreyer, 2000; Janzen, 2002; Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; O'Maley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Using these different methods of data generation assists in triangulating the information emanating from the data.

### **3.5.2 Rigour**

As in quantitative research, the basic strategy to ensure rigour in qualitative research is systematic and conscious research design, data generation, interpretation, and communication. Furthermore, there are two goals that qualitative researchers should seek to achieve: to create an account of method and data that can stand independently so that another researcher could analyse the same data in the same way and come to essentially the same conclusions; and to produce a plausible and coherent explanation of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

This research is exploratory and based on a case study. The research attempts to primarily describe a situation. A case study could, however, be regarded as being subjective and influenced by the researcher. Denscombe (1998:40) mentions that the researcher is sometimes so involved in the investigation that he/she has difficulty in being objective.

Other possible challenges one should bear in mind would include the difficulty of clearly defining the area and scope of investigation and it is furthermore often difficult for the researcher to elicit meaningful responses from the participants because information sought is mostly very personal or participants attempt to give the answers they consider to be the “right” ones (Denscombe, 2002:73).

Further criticism against the use of a case study could be the fact that it is rather difficult to generalise the findings from the investigation, especially if the sample size is relatively small as was the case in this investigation. The generation of data from a case study and the processing thereof can also be more time consuming than in other research methods (e.g. when compared to the quantitative experimental method) (Denscombe, 2002:68).

Since qualitative research is by nature subjective and heavily dependent on the researcher's perception of the situation under investigation, I have applied triangulation of data sources and types to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the research. Triangulation is a very broad concept used differently by different researchers. Kelle (2001: paragraph 16) distinguishes three meanings or models of triangulation: (1) triangulation as the mutual

validation of results obtained on the basis of different methods (the validity model), (2) triangulation as a means toward obtaining a larger, more complete picture of the phenomenon under study (the complementarity model), and (3) triangulation in its original trigonometrical sense, indicating that a combination of methods is necessary in order to gain any (not necessarily a fuller) picture of the relevant phenomenon at all (the trigonometry model). These three models are in turn brought to bear upon the potential relationships between the results yielded by qualitative and quantitative methods employed in the same study.

Based on information gained from Babbie and Mouton (1998), Denscombe (1998, 2002), Gorard and Taylor (2004) and Zuber-Skeritt (1992) and for the purpose of this investigation, I regarded triangulation as the use of multiple methods in data generation or the viewing of data from different vantage points to enhance the validity and reliability of research findings in primarily qualitative research; when a single research method is being used as well as when combined methods are used. Babbie and Mouton (1998:275) regard triangulation to be one of the best ways to enhance validity and reliability in qualitative research. There is, however, no consensus amongst researchers as to how triangulation should be applied. Some researchers argue that triangulation involves the generation of data from three vantage points, or the collection of three different types of data in order to determine something about a fourth phenomenon lying within the notional triangle formed by the three points. Other sources explain that triangulation involves only two vantage points or sets of data to inform about a third phenomenon (Gorard & Taylor, 2004:130-135). Many researchers who make use of a case study use three different methods of triangulation to enhance research validity and reliability: results and findings are tested by research participants, various methods of data generation are employed and where the observation method is used, more than one observer is used (Zuber-Skeritt, 1992:138).

In this study the following was done to enhance the reliability and validity of data generated in the case study:

- More than one method of data generation was employed: TOEFL English proficiency test (quantitative data), SILL questionnaire for speakers of other languages learning English, Mahlobo questionnaire, interviews with participants and teachers who had taught both groups of participants during the course of 2004 and 2006 respectively, focus group interviews with the one group of participants; the findings were compared with other researchers' studies;
- The answers to questions on the SILL questionnaire were tested with participants;
- The Mahlobo questionnaire was translated into French and French-speaking Gabonese students were interviewed by a French-speaking interviewer to maximise



their understanding of the questions in this questionnaire. The information obtained from these interviews with the supporting questionnaires provided evidence that the students understood the questions asked in the SILL.

- A second group of Gabonese students who studied English at Stellenbosch University was used to compare their reported LLS use to the data obtained from the original group of 5 Gabonese participants.

## **3.6 DATA GENERATING INSTRUMENTS**

The following data generating instruments were used in the investigation:

The TOEFL standardised English proficiency test; the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning compiled by Rebecca Oxford (Oxford, 1990); interviews with all 7 initial participants; focus group interviews with 19 Gabonese student volunteers; a questionnaire compiled by Mahlobo (Mahlobo, 1998) which was completed by three Gabonese participants and interviews with teachers who taught the two sets of participants in 2004 and 2006.

### **3.6.1 Standardised English Proficiency Test: TOEFL**

#### **3.6.1.1 Objective of the test**

The Institutional paper-based TOEFL proficiency test was used to determine the level of English proficiency of each of the initial seven participants. The North American private educational measurement organisation, Educational Testing Service (ETS), has various English proficiency tests, of which the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is perhaps the most commonly used worldwide for admission to tertiary education offered through the medium of English. It has the advantage of being standardised and this test was chosen since it was the one used by the University of Stellenbosch to determine which students should be compelled to do an English programme as a prerequisite to doing postgraduate study, as well as to determine the level of further English instruction each student would require to contribute to their success in their particular academic course at Stellenbosch University. Six different levels of EFL classes were on offer to students, ranging from a beginner's course for those with only a basic communicative ability in English to an advanced course which focussed on understanding and interpreting different texts and different forms of spoken English (an attempt to simulate the academic environment). All of the students (participants) in this study had successfully completed at least level five (upper-intermediate) of the EFL programme by the time they took the TOEFL test for the first time in July 2004.



### 3.6.1.2 Description of the test

Each form of the current paper-based TOEFL test consists of three separately timed sections.

Section 1, *listening comprehension*, measures the ability to understand English as it is spoken in the United States of America. The items tested include vocabulary and idiomatic expression as well as specific grammatical constructions frequently used in spoken English. The stimulus material and oral questions are recorded in standard North American English and the response options are printed in the test books.

Section 2, *structure and written expression*, measures recognition of selected structural and grammatical items in standard, formal written English. Sentence topics are of a general academic nature to eliminate bias.

Section 3, *reading comprehension*, measures the ability to read and understand short passages similar to what might be encountered in study materials at North American tertiary institutions. Examinees read a variety of short passages on academic subjects and answer several questions about each passage.

The questions in each section are multiple-choice and each question has four options. The total test time is approximately 150 minutes (taking into account the time lost between different sections of the test when test takers page to the next section in their question booklets and the invigilator prepares audio-cassettes for the next section). After the test has been administered, answers given by test takers on the grid-like paper sheets provided by the examining body are computer scored. Language specialists prepare TOEFL test materials according to overall guidelines for test content as specified by the TOEFL Committee of Examiners. All items are reviewed for cultural bias and content appropriateness according to established ETS procedures.

This test has a score scale range of 310-677 and although the Educational Testing Service (ETS) regards a CI (Effective Operational Proficiency Level) score of a minimum of 560 necessary for admission to tertiary studies through the medium of English, Stellenbosch University deems a prospective student with a minimum score of 550 on this test to have proficient English skills to pursue post-graduate studies through the medium of English. ETS research indicates that a student with a minimum CI score of 560 can be regarded to have the following skills:

- The ability to understand a wide range of demanding texts, recognising implicit meaning
- The ability to express himself fluently
- Can use English language effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.

- Is able to produce succinct, well-constructed, detailed text on complex subjects, using controlled organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive constructions. ([www.toefl.org](http://www.toefl.org)).

I selected this standardised English proficiency test since it is the test of preference used by Stellenbosch University in admitting international students to the academic programmes (and is thus very applicable to the situation under investigation) and also because it is widely used and highly regarded world-wide.

### **3.6.1.3 Application of the test in the investigation**

13 students took the Institutional paper-based TOEFL proficiency test in July 2004 and the highest score was 530. I had intended to compare the LLS use of subjects who scored 550+ to the LLS use of subjects with scores below 550. Since no one scored 550 or more in the TOEFL, this was no longer possible. I thus compared the LLS use of the subjects with low scores to findings in previous research.

The results of the TOEFL test need to be interpreted cautiously. This test has a time constraint which could be a cultural bias for students from Gabon: teachers of Gabonese students at Stellenbosch University have over the past four years noted that in general these students take longer to complete formal examinations and tests in English when compared to their classmates. This observation was confirmed by the coordinator who has been involved in the EFL teacher education programme (for prospective Gabonese English language teachers) at Stellenbosch University for the past four years. Low scores could therefore be a matter of performance within time constraints rather than actual competence.

### **3.6.2 Questionnaire survey**

Questionnaires are used in qualitative research to generate information from people in a non-threatening way in as short a period of time as possible. Some of the other advantages of questionnaires are that they are inexpensive to administer, easy to compare and analyse, and that many sample questionnaires already exist (Mertens, 2005:345). Challenges to using questionnaires in research could include: wording can bias participant's responses, they are impersonal, the researcher might not get careful feedback, and the full picture of the situation is generally not apparent (Mertens, 2005:345). The use of questionnaires in my study helped me provide direction to the study since the most important questionnaire (SILL) contained closed questions and responses to questions were limited in a multiple-choice format. These questionnaires were easy to administer and easy to compare and analyse. The other questionnaire (Mahlobo, 1999) was open-ended and this also served its purpose

for I sought to determine whether the participants understood the questions asked in the SILL questionnaire.

### **3.6.2.1 Strategy inventory for Language Learning (SILL): the objective**

As indicated in Chapter 2 (refer to 2.3), different classifications for language learning strategies exist. The concept of "learning strategies" is based in part on cognitive learning theory, in which learning is seen as an active, mental, learner-constructed process. Based on this, various researchers have identified and classified learning strategies applicable to language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 2002; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Rubin, 1981). Based on her classification of Language learning Strategies, Rebecca Oxford (1990) put together the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a survey that provides information about the strategies that the individual learner employs to learn a second language. The SILL separates language learning strategies into two strategy orientations and six strategy groups: (a) direct learning orientation, consisting of (i) memory, (ii) cognitive, and (iii) linguistic deficiency compensation strategy groups, and (b) indirect learning orientation, consisting of (i) meta-cognitive, (ii) affective, and (iii) social strategy groups.

Direct learning orientation strategies involve the identification, retention, storage, or retrieval of words, phrases, and other elements of the target language. Indirect strategies concern the management of the learning and involve activities such as needs assessment, activities planning and monitoring, and outcome evaluation. Indirect strategies also involve aspects which assist the learner in regulating emotions, motivation, and attitudes. These include routines for self-encouragement and the reduction of anxiety, and those which address the actions learners take in order to communicate with others, such as asking questions for clarification and cooperating with others in communication.

Each of these six strategy groups can be further subdivided, providing a compendium of 62 specific strategies. Oxford's model outlines a comprehensive, multi-levelled, and theoretically well-conceived taxonomy of language learning strategies. This taxonomy usefully encompasses a continuum of strategies, from affective personal management and general approaches to basic learning to specific language learning, memory, and communicative techniques.

I used students' responses to the Strategy Inventory to generate qualitative data from participants on how they view their use of language learning strategies when learning English. I also used this test to generate more qualitative data from a teacher who taught the initial 7 participants to find out how she saw their language learning strategy use in the EFL classroom.

### **3.6.2.2 Strategy inventory for Language Learning: the history**

Strategies are the tools for active, self-directed involvement needed for developing second language communicative ability (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Research has repeatedly shown that the conscious, tailored use of such strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency (Bialystok, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Dreyer, 2000; Griffiths & Parr, 2001; Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003; Nunan, 2002; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990 & 1995; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Phakiti, 2003; Purpura, 1997; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a) and the use of Oxford's SILL to generate data was regarded to be suitable for this investigation since it has been used widely internationally, but also locally (Mahlobo, 1999; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a), in previous research of a nature similar to this investigation.

### **3.6.2.3 Strategy inventory for Language Learning: this investigation**

In August 2004 students who took the TOEFL test in July 2004 were asked to voluntarily complete Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning: Version for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English (Oxford, 1990). Only 7 students (2 female and five male) were willing to complete the questionnaire; 5 Gabonese (TOEFL scores from 410 to 490), 1 German (TOEFL score = 527) and 1 Korean (TOEFL score = 530). Answers to some questions in the SILL suggested strongly that subjects did not always understand the questions asked.

One of the EFL teachers who taught the initial 7 participants at some stage during 2004 was also asked to complete a slightly adapted version of the SILL for each of the participants to determine how she experienced their use of LLS in the EFL classroom. Unfortunately the teacher eventually felt that she did not have enough exposure to the students to be able to answer this questionnaire for each student. An interview was held with her instead where she expressed her views on how she experienced the students in this investigation, as well as other students, in her classes.

### **3.6.3 Interviews**

Interviews are used in research when the researcher wants to fully understand a person's experience of something, or when the researcher wants to learn more about participants' answers to questionnaires. Advantages of using interviews in research include: the researcher gets a full range and depth of information, and the researcher develops a relationship with the participants (Mertens, 2005:345). Interviews can, however, also take up a great deal of time and information may be incomplete. Data is also limited to the real-life situation that exists and the researcher must create meaning from what the participants give (Mertens, 2005:345).

What people say when they are interviewed should be treated with extreme care. Interviewees have their own unique perception of what an interview is all about – often gained through their experience, for example of talk shows on television - and might even want to impress the interviewer with their answers – which might not necessarily be an accurate answer to the question asked by the interviewer. They might even tell lies. At best interviewees will only give what they are prepared to reveal about their subjective perceptions of events and opinions. These opinions and perceptions will change over time, and according to circumstance. They may also be at some considerable distance from any “reality” as others might see it (Walford, 2001:90). On the other hand the interviewer might influence the interviewee’s answers through many factors such as gender, clothing, accent, tone, appearance, perceived authority (Walford, 2001:89). Interviewees will always have subjective perceptions and their answers are specific to the time and situation: the same interviewee might present different answers to the same questions if the interview is presented again at a later stage. It would therefore be preferable not to use the data generated from interviews as the sole or major source of data on which to base qualitative research descriptions. The researcher should always remember to stay focused on what the people do (which can be obtained through observation or other methods of data production) and should not be distracted by what the people say they do. Fortunately the process of triangulation is generally considered to assist in balancing research data to ensure greater accuracy in reflecting the situation under investigation and this could help in eliminating some researcher bias.

Despite the many difficulties interviews may have, there are some obvious reasons why the interview is so widely used in qualitative research: interviews allow the researcher to generate a great deal of data relatively quickly. Interviews allow people to express their views about a wide range of issues, and to wait for such information to be generated in naturally occurring situations would not only be very time consuming, but some information might not even present in naturally occurring situations at all. The interview also allows for particular questions to be asked that cannot be asked in any other situation (Walford, 2001:92).

The arrival of the cassette tape recorder in the 1960s made life much easier for researchers who relied on data production from interviews with subjects. Researchers could tape whole interviews and transcribe them later to ensure maximum benefit in data production. It also ruled out researchers’ incorrect perceptions of what subjects had said during interviews. In this investigation I also made use of a tape recorder to capture interviews (including focus group interviews) with the participants.

Interviews with students who completed the questionnaire were conducted in English by the researcher. The subjects’ low English proficiency was a concern and I was unsure of

whether they understood the questions in the interview. I therefore made use of a French-speaking interpreter for further interviews with Gabonese subjects in an attempt to verify their responses. The interpreter translated, from English into French, the questions in the SILL-based Interview (SBI) schedule drawn up by Mahlobo (1999). The SBI schedule contained a refined version of the SILL since it contained probing questions based on learners' responses to SILL items. Mahlobo compiled this questionnaire in an attempt to try and establish whether students who took the SILL questionnaire (Oxford, 1990) actually understood enough English to be able to produce accurate responses to the questions in the SILL. Students were presented with a paper copy of the French version of the Mahlobo SBI questionnaire and the interpreter read out the questions to the subjects and they answered in French. These interviews were recorded on audiocassette and translated into English by the French-speaking interpreter/translator.

I also had interviews and discussions with English teachers who had the participants in their classes during the course of 2004. An interview with one of the teachers was semi-structured because I wanted to find out how the teacher perceived each student's use of LLSs in class. Providing some structure ensured that I obtained information I was looking for.

#### **3.6.4 Focus groups**

Focus groups are a valuable tool to collect a lot of data in a short space of time (Babbie & Mouton, 1998 & 2001; Denscombe, 1998 & 2002; Durrheim, 1999). They are basically interviews on a directed topic with a group of people at the same time (Goss & Leibach, 1996; Kreuger 1988). Focus groups are used to get different people's responses on a given topic in the same environmental setting (Babbie & Mouton, 1998; Durrheim, 2002). Focus groups also help researchers tap into the many different forms of communication that people use in day-to-day interaction, including jokes, anecdotes, and arguing. Gaining access to such a variety of communication is useful because people's knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions. Everyday forms of communication may tell us as a lot about what people know or experience. Focus groups are thus able to reach the parts that other methods cannot reach, thus revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data generation methods. Another distinct benefit of focus group research is that one can gain insight into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. In this investigation I elicited responses on education and language learning in the Gabonese culture and in the current Gabonese education system. It is common for the group session to be audio-taped (or sometimes videotaped) for later analysis (Kreuger, 1988). In this investigation I audio-taped the focus group interviews.



The focus interviewing process can be divided into three stages (Krueger, 1988): Conceptualisation, Interview, Analysis and reporting. In the conceptualisation stage one would decide who your participants will be (e.g. their demographic characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, education) and how you are going to plan the process to best obtain the results you are seeking. In the conceptualisation phase the questions for the focus group interviews must also be finalised. Questions to be posed to the group must be well-structured and clear to elicit the desired responses. I used four questions in the focus group interviews with the group of 19 Gabonese participants in August 2006:

- What do you think is a good way to learn a new language (e.g. English)?
- What methods or strategies do you use to learn English?
- How are Gabonese children and young adults taught English at school, college and university?
- How would you teach English/facilitate the learning of English?

In this conceptualisation phase the researcher should also decide how many participants to have per group. Generally, the recommended number of people per group is six to ten, but some researchers use up to fifteen members in a group (Goss & Leinbach, 1996) while others use as few as four (Kitzinger, 1995). It is very important to plan focus group interviews well and participants to each group must be selected with care to ensure that each group member will participate equally in divulging information. Meetings must be scheduled well in advance and in comfortable venues to put participants at ease.

The next stage in the focus group interviewing process is the actual interviewing. Once a meeting for the interviewing has been arranged, the role of the group facilitator becomes critical, especially in terms of providing clear explanations of the purpose of the group, helping people feel at ease, and facilitating interaction between group members (Durrheim, 2002). I facilitated the focus groups in my investigation. I made the purpose of the investigation clear to the group of 19 participants in a big group before I invited these prospective participants to join the focus group interviews. 22 Gabonese attended the big group information session, but only 19 of them arrived for the focus group interviews since I explained that ethical considerations in research determine that all participation is voluntary. On the day of the focus group interviews I again explained the background to my investigation as well as the process of focus group interviewing. I was well prepared for each focus group session and I checked at the beginning of each session whether each participant understood the process by asking each participant whether he/she understood or wanted to ask questions. These 19 Gabonese participants were eager to participate in the focus groups. Their willingness to participate in the focus groups could possibly have stemmed from the fact that they, like me, are committed to teaching and committed to improving



teaching practice continually. We were colleagues from different backgrounds discussing a common situation: language learning. A two-way process was thus immediately established whereby I gained insight into their language learning experiences and they gained insight into different aspects of language learning strategies.

In each interviewing session I had to establish rapport with the participants and this was done by an informal discussion on our families and teaching experience at the beginning of the interviewing session. I found it worked well with each group as the participants were all very eager to speak. I had no problem in eliciting responses: my greatest challenge was to direct the process so that participants would have equal opportunity to voice their opinions. During the meeting the group facilitator should promote debate, perhaps by asking open questions. I did this throughout the interviews. The facilitator may need to challenge participants, especially to draw out people's differences, and elicit a diverse range of meanings on the topic under discussion. Diverse responses emerged spontaneously from each focus group. Sometimes the group facilitator will have to probe for details, or move things forward when the conversation is drifting or has reached a minor conclusion. The participants were all so eager that I never encountered this situation in the focus groups. Facilitators also have to keep the interview session focused and sometimes they may deliberately have to steer the conversation back on course. The facilitator is encouraged not to show too much approval (Kreuger, 1988), so as to avoid favouring particular participants. I believe I did not favour any participants and I did not experience the participants as being competitive in the group situation. The facilitator must avoid giving personal opinions so as not to influence participants towards any particular position or opinion. I attempted to do all of the above while facilitating the focus group interviews. I felt my role as facilitator was demanding and challenging, but very rewarding – not only for this research, but also for personal gain. I realised that for focus groups to be successful, the facilitator needs good interpersonal skills: a good listener, non-judgmental and adaptable. These qualities promote the participants' trust in the facilitator and increase the likelihood of open, interactive dialogue. There needs to be consistency across focus groups and the facilitator should thus be sensitive to the need to maintain a constant standard throughout all the focus group interviews. I focused on maintaining a constant atmosphere throughout all the focus group interviews in an attempt to standardise the elicited responses as far as possible.

The final stage in the focus group interviewing process is analysis and reporting. This will be presented in Chapter 4 of this research report.

### **3.6.5 Validity of data generating instruments**

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:123), the term *content validity* embraces the range of meanings that might be implied by the use of a specific concept. Denscombe (1998:213) considers research results to be valid if findings are in line with the complexity of the problem, if the researcher does not influence the results and if triangulation has been applied.

#### **3.6.5.1 Validity of the questionnaires**

Both the questionnaires (the SILL by Rebecca Oxford and the SILL-based interview schedule QP012 by Eric Mahlobo) used in this investigation were drawn up by other researchers and validity was established previously.

Oxford's SILL was field-tested at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California in November 1985. Oxford and Mildred Cuevas, an independent language expert and Spanish teacher, conducted a content validity of the SILL and they concluded that it adequately and clearly represented the range of potential language learning strategies (Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995b:310). Based on the demonstration of strong relationships between SILL factors and self-ratings of language proficiency and language motivation, concurrent and construct validity can be assumed (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

#### **3.6.5.2 Validity of the interviews**

Validity of interviews is generally an issue of concern in qualitative research. Therefore it is crucial that each interviewee in the case study understands the questions asked in the same way. In this investigation I attempted to eliminate discrepancy in interviews by making use of the same interviewee for each type of interview and by conducting interviews of each type on the same day, e.g. I conducted all the interviews after the participants had completed the SILL on the same day and the French interpreter conducted all three interviews with the Gabonese participants, using the translated Mahlobo (1999) questionnaire, on the same day.

### **3.6.6 Reliability of data generating instruments**

Reliability in research can be regarded to be the degree of consistency in outcomes there will be if different researchers are to conduct the same research or when one researcher repeats the same research. Denscombe (1998:213) assesses the reliability of research by determining whether the data generating instruments are neutral with regard to the influence they have on the research and whether the same outcomes will be generated if the research is to be repeated at a different time.

### 3.6.6.1 Reliability of the questionnaires

Questionnaires used in this investigation were taken from other researchers (Oxford, 1990 and Mahlobo, 1999) and thus reasonable reliability had already been established.

The reliability of the SILL was assessed using Cronbach's alpha on the field test data. The internal consistency reliability was 0,95 when based on the DLI field test sample and 0,96 when based on a 1200-person university sample (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989 and Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995b:310).

### 3.6.6.2 Reliability of the interviews

Researchers often regard reliability in interviewing a challenge, and with good reason. Data generated in interviews are based on participants' views and perceptions and what information they are prepared to divulge. Participants might not tell the truth during an interview and there is often no way for the interviewer and researcher to know this. The impact of the interviewer and the context could make objectivity hard to achieve. Data generated are unique and this could have an adverse effect on reliability (Denscombe, 2002:99). Interviews need however not be seen as opposition to other data generating methods and not used because the validity might be questionable, but should rather be combined with other methods to corroborate facts using different approaches and thus contribute to the triangulation of data generated.



## 3.7 CONSIDERATIONS FOR ETHICS AND VALIDITY

Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999:65) strongly contend that the purpose of ethical research planning is to ensure the protection of all participants in terms of their rights and welfare. They suggest three ethical principles: *autonomy* (this implies that participants will have voluntary and informed consent, the freedom to withdraw at any time and the right to be anonymous in any publication), *nonmaleficence* (this implies the researcher needs to consider possible risks and harm that might be inflicted on people because of their participation) and *beneficence* (this implies that there needs to be benefits to doing the research). There are other important imperatives. Babbie and Mouton (2001:527), for instance, refer to the researcher's accountability in conducting research. This accountability requires the researcher to work in ways that are socially responsive and responsible. This point is also emphasised by Van Greunen, Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:viii) who argue that research should lead to transformation.

The implications were that I had to ensure that the informants understood their rights and that their participation was voluntary. They were assured of anonymity and their right to confidentiality and therefore no identifiable indicators have been used in this study. There did not seem to be any risks attached to their participation: there was for example no research group versus a control group where the control group would not benefit from new learning experiences. Finally, I had to consider ways of ensuring that this research could enhance future English programmes for EFL students. The findings of this investigation need to be communicated to the EFL programme facilitator at Stellenbosch University in an attempt to give the teaching of LLSs in the EFL curriculum a more prominent position.

The validity of the study was an important consideration. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:123), the term *content validity* embraces the range of meanings that might be implied by the use of a specific concept. Critics might argue that a case study would offer many limitations, such as the validity of knowledges, the difficulty of testing causal links and of making generalisations based on a single case study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:256). Within a post-modern paradigm, it is the reader, not the researcher, who decides what knowledges will be useful in other similar situations. As (Merriam, 2002:179) drawing on the work of Erickson (1986) puts it, “the general lies in the particular”: knowledges constructed during a specific situation may be useful in similar contexts or situations.

David Silverman (1993:94-95 in Babbie & Mouton, 2001:124) emphasises the importance of constructing “a deep mutual understanding” during interactions between the researcher and informants. In the case of this study, this necessitated the mediation of an interpreter as is explained in 3.6.3. and 3.7.1.

### **3.7.1 Researcher subjectivity**

I was part of the research project and I am very aware of the fact that I could have been leading subjects on during interviews – especially Gabonese students. I have been teaching English to Gabonese students for five years and it is likely that I have unconscious assumptions about what their reactions and responses will be. The interviews in French should be more productive since the interpreter was removed from the research.

## **3.8 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS EMPLOYED**

Four methods of data generation were employed in this investigation, English proficiency tests, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Data generated were analysed in different ways as explained in the section that follows.

### **3.8.1 Qualitative data analysis**

Various previous researchers have identified LLSs to be a contributing factor in performance on an English language proficiency test (Dreyer, 2000; Mahlobo, 1999; Oxford, 1990). The use of language learning strategies cannot be measured in a quantitative way and I had to rely on the participants to provide an indication of how they think they go about learning English and on how a teacher perceived them to be using LLSs to learn English. The use of LLSs could thus only be investigated by means of qualitative data generating methods.

### **3.8.2 Quantitative data analysis**

The only form of quantitative data analysis used in this research is the ranking of the scoring of the TOEFL English language proficiency test and the scoring and ranking of the SILL. The relationship between scores on the TOEFL and scores on the SILL will not be approached in a statistical way since the sample was too small to be able to draw meaningful conclusions from statistical analysis. The objective of this study was also not to produce data that could be generalised to large populations, but to zoom in on the particular EFL situation at Stellenbosch University.

## **3.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter reported on the research methodology employed in this study. The motivation for using a qualitative approach with a case study and the instruments used to generate data in this case study, were explained. A case study provided the best fit for the situation under investigation, viz. EFL learners at Stellenbosch University. The research process did not proceed as planned, but the findings were nevertheless of great interest to me. Chapter 4 contains an interpretation and analysis of the data generated.

# CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF THE INVESTIGATION

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Research has indicated the importance of language learning strategies in making language learning more efficient and in producing a positive effect on learners' language proficiency (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Cohen, 1998; Dreyer, 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990 & 1995; Oxford, 1990 & 1996).

This chapter consists of an analysis of the research data produced for this investigation to understand the role of language learning strategies in improving the English language proficiency of international students at Stellenbosch University. This is an account of my perception of how international students learn English at Stellenbosch University; the data is presented in a narrative form – I tell my story. The focus is therefore on qualitative data, with particular emphasis on the relationship between participants' responses on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and their English language proficiency, cultural and educational backgrounds, teacher-centredness versus learner-centredness in the learning process, gender and language learning, and motivation to learn English.

Data obtained from participants were integrated with observation data obtained from interviews and informal discussions with English teachers who taught all the participants at some stage of their training at Stellenbosch University, and with my own observations of students in the EFL programme in general. As mentioned in previous chapters, this investigation focused on adult learners of English at Stellenbosch University who were trying to improve their English proficiency for various career-related reasons; some to be admitted to tertiary studies in the Western Cape (Stellenbosch University and CPU) and others to equip themselves to be English teachers in their own country (Gabon).

The chapter starts with an account of the procedure I followed in obtaining the data, including the many amendments to the original plan.

The second section of the chapter provides a description of the themes found in the data: participants' responses to the EFL programme; the relationship between English proficiency scores on the TOEFL and scores on the SILL; culture, educational background, motivation, gender and individual learner factors that impact on LLS use and language proficiency. These have been derived from different types of data:

1. Observations and reflections of the EFL learning process in the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University. My personal observations were enriched by other EFL teachers' observations and perceptions which were obtained during a formal interview and informal discussions.
2. Initial 7 participants' scores on the standardised English proficiency test (the paper-based TOEFL),
3. Initial 7 participants' perceptions of how they learn English in the EFL programme (SILL completed by each participant)
4. SILL scores of an additional 22 Gabonese participants
5. Focus group interviews with the additional 19 Gabonese participants

The third section of the chapter provides a discussion of the themes and links the themes to literature and previous research.

The final section of the chapter provides some reflections on the research.

## **4.2 DATA GENERATING PROCESS**

My original plan was to use a group of at least 30 students from the 2004 EFL programme at Stellenbosch University in action research focused on language learning strategies. I wanted to select the group based on their English language proficiency test results. The test results would have been used to select a group of students for my research: 10 who performed above average on the test, 10 who performed average on the test and 10 who performed below average on the test.

Upon their arrival in Stellenbosch, all non-English international students are required to take an English proficiency test administered by the University. Based on the results obtained in this English test, students are strongly advised (and sometimes compelled by their departments or sponsoring bodies) to participate in the EFL programme at a certain level (there are 6 levels). I wanted to use the results on this test to select a group of students for my research, but unfortunately this was not a standardised English proficiency test.

The first standardised English proficiency test administered by the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University in 2004, was the TOEFL (paper-based) at the end of July 2004 and only thirteen students (of which eight were Gabonese students), who had participated in the EFL programme since January 2004, took the test. All these students had completed at least level 5 (Upper-intermediate) of the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University. I decided to select 9 students from this group, namely three (3) high-performance learners, three (3) average-performance learners and three (3) low-performance learners. The nine



students would have joined the study voluntarily and would have self-reported their language learning strategy use by completing the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990). Unfortunately the students performed rather poorly on the TOEFL test, with not one even scoring the minimum of 550 required for admission to postgraduate studies. Test scores ranged from 410 to 530. Of these thirteen students only seven volunteered to participate in my research by completing the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and volunteering for an interview with me to discuss the learning strategies they use to learn English.

This situation limited my intended research even further in the following ways:

- The sample who took the TOEFL test was very small (thirteen). I had initially hoped to select thirty students from a group who had taken a standardised English proficiency test;
- When I realised that I would not have a sample of 30 students and that I was not able to conduct action research, I hoped to find 3 learners each with above average TOEFL scores, average TOEFL scores and below average TOEFL scores, but I could not divide the group into above-average, average, and below average since there were no test-takers who performed above average;
- I had also hoped for a diverse group, but of the seven volunteer participants, five were Gabonese students, one was German and one was Korean.

Since I had no participants who achieved above-average scores on the TOEFL test, I was concerned that they might not have fully understood the questions that were asked in the SILL since these were in English. A week after the initial 7 participants had completed the SILL, I had individual interviews with them to verify their responses on the SILL. I came across research done by Eric Mahlobo (1999) for a DEd degree at UNISA where he also used the SILL and had the same concern that the participants might not have understood the questions in the SILL, because they were in English. He then drew up a questionnaire (in English) to test whether his participants understood certain key concepts which appeared in the SILL. I wanted to use his questionnaire, but then learnt from the EFL teacher I interviewed that she had already done the SILL questionnaire with all the participants I had in this study in a class situation where students could ask for clarity on questions they did not understand. The students were thus familiar with the SILL when I asked them to complete it. I did, however, have the Mahlobo questionnaire translated into French and a French interpreter did interviews (based on the translated questionnaire) with three Gabonese participants to establish whether they had originally understood the questions in the English SILL. From their responses, it appears that those students had understood the questions in the SILL.

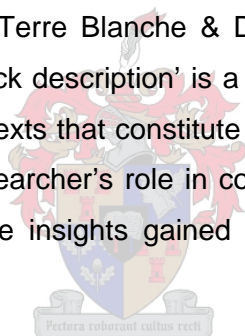
To validate the participants' responses on the SILL, I asked an EFL teacher in August 2004 if she would be prepared to answer some questions on the learning behaviour of each of the participants in my study, based on her observations during her class contact with them. The teacher was interested in my investigation and decided to introduce language learning strategy instruction in the EFL programme. This was, however, not integrated into existing classes, but offered as a practical, optional class in an afternoon session. The teacher was so busy that the interview was continually deferred. Since I felt that she might be more willing to participate if I did so, I modified the SILL slightly so that she could complete a SILL-like questionnaire for each participant in her own time. However, this did not happen. Ethical considerations meant that I could not press her. Researcher must at all times consider whether their actions are ethically acceptable: I had to bear in mind that participants must be allowed to participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion. Ethics also dictate that research should not cause harm to participants and I was not sure whether forcing the interview issue might cause the teacher emotional stress. It was in October 2005 that I eventually had an interview with the teacher, which was taped on audio-cassette. I did as much as possible to put my interviewee at ease. I conducted the interview in Afrikaans as she requested. I also structured the interview to an extent by giving the teacher questions and guidelines on a sheet of paper beforehand in an attempt to elicit responses to questions related to my investigation (refer to Addendum A). From informal discussion with other teachers in the EFL programme, I sensed that they were eager to divulge information about their students in informal discussions, but felt a little intimidated by formal, audio-taped interviews. I therefore had various informal discussions with them on their perceptions of the English learning process in their EFL classes.

I felt that the data I had generated from the 7 EFL participants and their teachers was not sufficient to give me rich description; I needed to generate more data. It would have been ideal to obtain more data from the same EFL programme, but unfortunately the International Office EFL programme was stopped at the end of 2004. As of the beginning of 2005 the Stellenbosch University Language Centre took responsibility for English language assistance to all Stellenbosch University students who required such assistance (including international students). The Language Centre programme offers mainly English support courses which are not as intensive (full-time) as what was previously on offer by the International Office. Instead of approaching students in the Language Centre's English programme, I generated data from a group of 22 Gabonese students who were participating in an intensive EFL teacher education programme in the Faculty of Education in 2006. I liked the idea of generating more data from Gabonese people in an English programme, because I had 5 Gabonese students in my initial group of participants and I could see a pattern of learning behaviour unfolding: I could test and supplement what I had learnt with more Gabonese

participants. This additional data generated with the assistance of the group of 22 Gabonese education students has indeed provided a more complete picture of how Gabonese students approach the learning of English.

The data I have generated is not exactly what I had originally intended to generate. I originally wanted to direct the primary focus of this research on the relationship between English language proficiency and reported LLS use on the SILL, but as my data generation process unfolded, I learnt that it would be more useful to move away from the initial more quantitative approach to a more qualitative approach which would provide a more complete picture of the English learning (EFL) situation at Stellenbosch University. The qualitative approach provided information that would have been ignored by a predominantly quantitative approach which focused merely on whether a relationship between language proficiency and reported LLS use existed or not. I learnt a great deal about factors that underlie and influence the choice of LLS use in the language learning process – knowledge I would not have gained had I kept with my initial research intention.

As Terre Blanche and Kelly (in Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999: 130), calling on Clifford Geertz's definition, explain: a 'thick description' is a thorough account of the characteristics, processes, transactions and contexts that constitute the phenomenon in authentic language, as well as an account of the researcher's role in constructing this description. I attempt to provide a thick description of the insights gained in this investigation in the section that follows.



### **4.3 MY OBSERVATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS**

What follows is my attempt to share my observations and reflections on the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University using an academic setting as framework. I chose an academic setting as framework because the participants were all in a foreign country (South Africa) to improve their academic skills, and also because this is my version of the EFL situation at Stellenbosch University and thus my reality and I needed to provide some structure to 'my story'. Furthermore, people function in a certain social environment in which many factors are at play at any given stage (e.g. various interpersonal relationships, educational background, culture, social values and beliefs). This is not an attempt to provide an objective description of my observations or the situation in the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University: this is my perception. This account of my observations is divided into different themes that emanated from the data generated and will be set out in section 4.4.

### 4.3.1 Background: the EFL programme

In 2000 the EFL programme was developed to consist of courses based on six levels of proficiency: Beginner, Elementary, Pre-intermediate, Intermediate, Upper-intermediate, and Advanced. All international students who were not English mother-tongue speakers participated in a non-standardised English language proficiency test upon their arrival at Stellenbosch University as was mentioned in Chapter 2. Based on these test results students were strongly advised and sometimes compelled to participate in one of (or a series of) the EFL courses above – in line with their level of English proficiency. Each EFL course (based on a certain level of proficiency) ran for 6 weeks, with 24 contact/class hours per week. The *Headway* series of EFL books (<http://www.oup.com/elt/global/products/headway>) formed the basis of the EFL syllabus. Other EFL text books (e.g. *English File*, with levels ranging from Beginner, through Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, and Upper-Intermediate) (<http://www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/isbn/3010?cc=gb>) were however used at times to provide some variety for teachers as well as for students who had to repeat EFL courses.

In 2003 the EFL course coordinators became aware of the fact that students who had successfully completed the Advanced level of the EFL programme had not attained the level of proficiency in English needed to succeed academically at Stellenbosch University. Post-advanced courses were introduced in an attempt to equip students with academic English. I taught one such a 6-week course to prepare students (8 Gabonese students) who were seeking admission to the MBA programme at Stellenbosch University. Although these students had successfully passed the EFL Advanced course, in my view only one student had the English skills necessary to succeed in an MBA programme at Stellenbosch University. The English skills of the other seven students were inadequate to pursue main stream postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University. My opinion was confirmed when the eight students took the SHL (<http://www.shl.com/SHL/za/>) admission test required by the Stellenbosch University Business School. Only the student I had identified as having adequate English skills was admitted to the MBA programme. He also subsequently successfully completed his MBA. After intensive intervention by staff in the International Office, the Business Economics department at Stellenbosch University was prepared to admit six of the remaining seven students to an extended Honours programme (one-year programme spread over two years). Four of these students successfully completed the honours programme. I am convinced that their underpreparedness was not so much a matter of academic background as inadequate English communication skills when they initially applied for admission to postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University. I believe that it is possible that they could have progressed at a faster rate if the EFL course (prior to postgraduate studies) had encouraged and promoted the optimal application of language

learning strategies. During the informal discussions with them, the other EFL teachers felt there was merit in this view.

EFL teachers in the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University came from a variety of backgrounds and although they met regularly for staff meetings on Tuesdays from 12:00-14:00 and shared their experiences with each other, very little further opportunity for development was provided to them. Of particular significance to this study, these EFL teachers were never explicitly made aware of the importance of language learning strategies or given training in the integration of these into the EFL syllabus. EFL students were therefore not trained to learn language learning strategies more effectively, except for the attempt made by the teacher I interviewed. She held afternoon tutorial sessions firstly to make students aware of language learning strategies and to secondly help them develop language learning strategies to suit their individual preferences and needs. These language learning strategy sessions, which started in June and finished at the end of July (two two-hour sessions per week for six weeks), were not integrated into the normal EFL course, but were offered separately in the afternoons. All the participants in this study attended these afternoon sessions. These sessions had just been completed by the time the participants sat for the TOEFL test for the first time at the end of July. These afternoon sessions took the form of small group discussions and often questionnaires were completed and then discussed. Students were also regularly requested to write down their objectives – long term and short term – with reference to their language studies, but also with reference to their lives in general. Sometimes these class activities were difficult because the concepts were abstract and unknown to the students and the teacher found that she had to simplify and explain language used in some of the questionnaires. In these sessions, the teacher made extensive use of the book by Brown, *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (Brown, 1994). From this book the teacher used the Oxford SILL (Oxford, 1990) in her sessions with the students. I asked her whether she felt that the students had understood the questions and she said that most of them had understood the questions. Where students did not understand, there were other students in the class who could provide clarity to them in their mother-tongue (this happened mostly with the French-speaking Gabonese students).

Students in EFL classes at Stellenbosch University were very diverse: they were all non-South African citizens and were either already studying at Stellenbosch University (mostly for non-degree purposes) or were preparing for studies (degree-seeking studies) at Stellenbosch University or CPUT. International semester students registered for subjects with the University for a semester only, and for non-degree purposes, and often wanted to improve their English at the same time. They were thus allowed to register for EFL courses

according to their level of English proficiency on the English proficiency test that all international students took upon their arrival at Stellenbosch University. The majority of the other international students in the EFL classes were compelled to successfully complete the EFL programme in order to be considered for admission to mainstream postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University or CPUT. Many of them were sponsored by their governments (e.g. Gabonese students in Science and Lexicography, Rwandan students in a variety of disciplines, Libyan students in Science and Eritrean students in all disciplines). These government sponsored students participated in the EFL programme in large numbers and very often they constituted the majority of students in an EFL class. This sometimes skewed the class dynamics a little and teachers had to work hard at facilitating the class situation to accommodate minority groups of EFL students in the classes. Students well-represented in the EFL class also often conversed in their mother-tongue in EFL classes, which is not always desirable when learning a new language – especially when the new language has to be learnt in a short period of time.

## **4.4 THEMES FROM THE DATA**

### **4.4.1 Patterns in TOEFL scores**

The paper-based TOEFL English proficiency test was developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS)

(<http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem.22f30af61d34e9c39a77b13bc3921509/?vgnnextoid=4ab65784623f4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD>) (download date 30 November 2005)

to provide fair and valid assessments of English language proficiency to help institutions to place students in educational programmes world-wide. The test consists of three sections: listening comprehension, recognition of written expression, and reading comprehension. It does not provide for the testing of the language skills of speaking and writing. ETS do however have other tests to evaluate these language skills. Students take the test at a set time in a set venue and answers to questions are noted on a multiple-choice answer sheet provided to each student. Table 4.1 contains the results of the seven initial participants in this study on two paper-based TOEFL tests taken during 2004.



**Table 4.1 Research data from the two TOEFL tests**

Name	Sex	Nationality	Age	TOEFL July 2004				TOEFL October 2004			
				I	II	III	Total	I	II	III	Total
Participant 1	F	German	41	56	51	51	<b>527</b>	59	53	53	<b>550</b>
Participant 2	M	Gabonese	23	47	40	51	<b>460</b>	51	53	55	<b>530</b>
Participant 3	M	Gabonese	26	44	47	45	<b>453</b>	48	49	50	<b>490</b>
Participant 4	M	Gabonese	24	50	49	48	<b>490</b>	49	55	48	<b>507</b>
Participant 5	F	Gabonese	19	46	37	40	<b>410</b>	49	46	46	<b>470</b>
Participant 6	M	Gabonese	26	44	39	46	<b>430</b>	49	53	48	<b>500</b>
Participant 7	M	Korean	34	49	55	55	<b>530</b>	0	0	0	<b>n/a</b>

The key to interpreting the TOEFL Effective Operational Proficiency Level test scores (CI) for the participants are presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2 Key to interpreting TOEFL test scores**

Section	Description	Range of possible scores
I	Listening comprehension	31-68
II	Structure / written expression	31-68
III	Reading comprehension	31-67
Total		310-667

Source:

[http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/TOEFL\\_iBT\\_Score\\_Comparison\\_Tables.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/TOEFL_iBT_Score_Comparison_Tables.pdf)

(Download date: 30 November 2005)

ETS research indicates that a student with a minimum average CI score of 560 can be regarded to be adequately proficient to study at tertiary level through the medium of English (refer to 2.3).

The following themes were found when considering TOEFL scores:

- This TOEFL test did not test for proficiency in writing and speaking, but only for reading and listening. This test score was merely used as a point of departure for this



investigation into a possible link between language learning strategy use and language proficiency.

- The test is by no means considered to be a reflection of the test takers' complete English language proficiency.
- This test is constructed in an American context which could impact unfavourably on students who are not familiar with their culture and context.
- This TOEFL test is a useful instrument in this exploratory investigation since it is a standardised instrument which automatically provided validity and reliability to research.
- None of the initial 7 participants could be regarded as having a general high level of proficiency in English since none of them obtained 560 or more on the TOEFL tests taken in July and October 2004.
- With particular reference to the language skills of listening and reading, ETS have found that a CI score of 56 on both Listening (section I of TOEFL test) and Reading (sections II and III of TOEFL test) comprehension should be adequate English proficiency in those language skills to enable a person to complete tertiary studies through the medium of English (refer to 2.4). Only the German student scored 56 in the listening comprehension section in the July TOEFL test and 59 in the listening comprehension test in the October TOEFL test. None of the other participants obtained scores to indicate adequate English proficiency in these two language skills areas.
- It is interesting to note that the Korean student scored notably lower on the listening comprehension section than on the other two sections (which involve reading comprehension) of the test. This is in line with observations by various teachers in the EFL programme that Korean students tend to generally concentrate on reading and writing English and not on listening and speaking English. This could be the product of their English curricula in Korea which focus on reading, writing and grammar and are exams (written) driven.
- According to ETS, a student with a CI minimum of 56 on sections II and III of the TOEFL test is regarded as having adequate reading skills to pursue studies through the medium of English (refer to 2.4). None of the participants scored 56 in these sections in either of the TOEFL tests.
- The Korean student and two of the Gabonese students scored 55 on the reading comprehension sections whereas the Gabonese did so only in the second TOEFL test in October 2004. The fact that the Korean student scored reasonably well on this section of the test could be attributed to his success in English courses in Korea which would most probably have focussed on reading and grammar. It could be that he learnt little in the Stellenbosch EFL programme because the teaching

methodology was very different from the approaches used by his Korean teachers. I found that Korean students in my EFL classes did not adapt well to my teaching and learning approach which encourages group work and encourages personal response and analysis. They often said to me that I must tell them what to do because I was the teacher. In their view, they would not gain as much if they had to rely on their own ability to discover things or learn from fellow students. The approach to learning English at Stellenbosch University could be difficult for Korean students to adapt to – especially when they are older and their previous educational experience is based on a very different paradigm.

- All the participants who took the TOEFL for a second time (in October 2004) gained higher scores. It may be assumed that learning had taken place and some form of language learning strategies had been employed – whether consciously or unconsciously. The Korean student was admitted to the MTh programme in July 2004 and was not required to re-take the TOEFL in October 2004. Since he very explicitly stated that his interest in English was limited to admission to the MTh programme, he did not volunteer to do the TOEFL test in October 2004.

#### **4.4.2 LLS patterns in Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)**

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford 1990) was described in depth in chapters 2 and 3 of this research study. According to Oxford (1990:8) language learning strategies are learners' actions to facilitate language learning. The SILL is a Likert-scale questionnaire developed by Rebecca Oxford (1990) where learners report on a scale of 1 to 5 on their perception of how they employ language learning strategies. Items in the SILL are strategy descriptions and were taken from a taxonomy of language learning strategies covering the four language skills areas of listening, reading, speaking and writing (Oxford, 1990: 293-296; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995: 310). The SILL covers fifty separate strategies and these strategies are grouped into six sections, and each section represents a particular group of strategies as set out in table 4.4 (Brown, 1994:202). The SILL was chosen for this study because it is comprehensive and widely used. The validity and reliability of the SILL have been established (Van der Walt and Dreyer, 1995b:310).

**Table 4.3 Description of the sections of the SILL**

Section	Group	Strategy function
A	Memory strategies	Remembering more effectively
B	Cognitive strategies	Using all mental processes
C	Compensation strategies	Compensating for missing knowledge
D	Metacognitive strategies	Organising and evaluating one's own learning
E	Affective strategies	Managing one's emotions
F	Social strategies	Learning with others

Source: Oxford (1990:293-296)

The strategies in sections A-C are direct strategies and involve the mental processing of the target language (in this study English), while sections D-F contain indirect strategies which support the learning process.

In completing the SILL, participants had to answer each question in terms of how well the item described them. The response options were: *1. Never or almost never true of me; 2. Usually not true of me; 3. Somewhat true of me; 4. Usually true of me; 5. Always or almost always true of me.* Scores for each section of the SILL were added to get a total for each section. The average for each section was calculated by dividing the total by the number of questions in that section. To figure out the overall average, the sums of all the sections were added and the total divided by 50 (the number of questions in the SILL). The key for interpreting SILL scores is provided in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 Key for the interpretation of SILL average scores**

Frequency	SILL averages	Evaluation
High	4.5 - 5.0	Always used
High	3.5 - 4.4	Usually used
Medium	2.5 - 3.4	Sometimes used
Low	1.5 - 2.4	Generally not used
Low	1.0 - 1.4	Never or almost never used

Source: Oxford (1990:300)

The LLS use of the seven participants, as obtained from the SILL, is presented in table 4.5

**Table 4.5**

**Research data from the SILL questionnaire completed by 7 EFL participants on 16 August 2004**

Surname	Sex	Nationality	Age		Reported scores on categories						
					A	B	C	D	E	F	Total
Participant 1	F	German	41		34	58	23	38	19	29	201
				Ave	3.78	4.14	3.83	4.22	3.17	4.83	4.02
Participant 2	M	Gabonese	23		20	38	20	29	14	22	143
				Ave	2.22	2.71	3.33	3.22	2.33	3.67	2.86
Participant 3	M	Gabonese	26		20	38	21	31	14	18	124
				Ave	2.22	2.71	3.50	3.44	2.33	3.00	2.48
Participant 4	M	Gabonese	24		22	56	24	41	22	28	165
				Ave	2.44	4.00	4.00	4.56	3.67	4.67	3.30
Participant 5	F	Gabonese	19		15	42	22	39	22	18	140
				Ave	1.67	3.00	3.67	4.33	3.67	3.00	2.80
Participant 6	M	Gabonese	26		26	49	22	31	17	20	145
				Ave	2.89	3.50	3.67	3.44	2.83	3.33	2.90
Participant 7	M	Korean	34		33	46	22	44	21	22	166
				Ave	3.67	3.29	3.67	4.89	3.50	3.67	3.32

Themes that emerged with regard to LLS use reported on the SILL by the 7 initial participants:

- The German and Korean participants have the highest average scores on the SILL which implies that they employ the greatest variety of LLS in their learning of English.
- The German and Korean participants have high frequency average scores in the use of memory strategies (which include strategies such as forming relationships between the known and the unknown in the target language).
- The German and Korean students also have high average scores in the use of metacognitive strategies (which include strategies such as organising and monitoring one's own work and progress).
- It is very interesting though to note that the Korean student scored himself high in the use of social strategies (average of 3.67), which include such strategies as asking English speakers to correct you when you speak and trying to learn about the culture of English speakers, while the interview with the EFL teacher suggested that this particular student was not eager to have contact with other people to improve his English (*"...dit beteken ook hoe jy uit jou kultuur uit klim en weer binne in die ander kultuur geidentifiseer raak... maar hy het dit nie gedoen nie..."*). This student had however been attending the afternoon classes this EFL teacher presented where the

SILL had been done in detail with the students. It could thus be that this participant knew what the desirable answers were and therefore answered what he thought would be the 'correct' answers in certain cases when I administered the SILL.

- The German student scored the highest in section F (social strategies) and according to the EFL teacher in the interview this is something the student consciously focussed on because she knew it was not her preferred way of learning, but that it could benefit her in her learning of English (*"Daar het sy bv gesien dat sy goed saam met ander leer, maar sy het nie in die begin daarvan gehou nie – sy moes keuses maak..."*).
- All five the Gabonese participants scored overall averages in the medium bracket of frequency of use (between 2.48 and 3.30).
- Three of the Gabonese students scored high in section F (social strategies) and the EFL teacher also noted that Gabonese students in general enjoyed social learning strategies (*"Gabonese hou oor die algemeen daarvan... goed saam met ander leer. Hulle was? goeie, behalwe E, het hulle goed in groepe gewerk."*) The E referred to is participant 3 in the table above and his reported LLS use in section F is 3 (which is medium) and in line with what the teacher observed of him in class.
- For the Gabonese participants section A (memory strategies) had the lowest frequency score in four of the five cases. Strategies in section A include: "I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them"; I use rhymes to remember new English words"; I review English lessons often".
- Four of the five Gabonese students also scored in the medium frequency bracket in section B (cognitive strategies), which include strategies such as "I try to find patterns in English"; I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English"; I read for pleasure in English".
- The Gabonese participants' responses to sections A and B on the SILL are consistent with data obtained from the EFL teacher in the interview, where she mentioned that Gabonese students might come from an educational system where they had not learnt as many learning skills as students from for example Germany or Korea (*"Kyk, die Gabonese sal vir jou sê ons sit in 'n klas en iemand gee vir ons klas en jy hou jou bek en jy kry en jy dink nie daaroor nie."*)

I compared the SILL scores of my 5 initial Gabonese participants from the EFL programme to the SILL scores of the 22 Gabonese English teachers who did a course at Stellenbosch University in 2006 (refer to addendum C) and the following themes emerged:

- I found a significant difference in reported LLS use between the two groups.
- The English teacher participants reported on average a much higher use of LLS as can be seen in Table 4.7 (average use = 3.475) than did the other Gabonese participants as detailed in table 4.6 (average use = 2.868).

- The Gabonese English teachers did not take a TOEFL test so that I could compare their English language proficiency scores to that of the EFL Gabonese students who did the TOEFL test, but from my interviews with the two groups of participants it was clear that the Gabonese English teachers had a significantly higher level of English proficiency in all areas of the language. This is most probably due to their university study in English.

#### **4.4.3 Relationship between TOEFL scores and SILL scores**

Previous research indicates a significant relationship between the use of LLSs and the performance on standardised language proficiency tests in adult learners (Dreyer, 2000; Green & Oxford, 1995; Mahlobo, 1999:104; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995:378). These findings are also reflected by the data in table 4.3 and the following themes emerged when TOEFL and SILL scores were compared:

- Participants 1 and 7 scored the highest on the first TOEFL in July and they were also the participants who reported the highest frequency of LLS use on the SILL.
- The other (all Gabonese) participants scored lower (and had very similar scores on the first TOEFL in July) and they also reported the lowest frequency of LLS use on the SILL – with the exception of participant 4 who scored low on the TOEFL, but reported high frequency use of LLS.
- Interestingly enough, participant 4 did not show a remarkable improvement in the second TOEFL test in October. His perception of his LLS use might be over-optimistic or he might have answered the SILL without attempting to fully understand what he was doing. He might also have not been interested in the investigation, and might merely have been participating because his Gabonese classmates did.
- Although this sample was very small, a definite relationship between LLS use and scores on the standardised English proficiency test (TOEFL) can be observed. The higher the scores on the TOEFL tests, the higher the reported LLS use on the SILL.

A summary of the scores on both TOEFL tests and the average scores on the SILL is presented in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6 The relationship between TOEFL and SILL scores**

Name	Sex	Nationality	Age	TOEFL 1	TOEFL 2	SILL
Participant 1	F	German	41	527	550	4.02
Participant 2	M	Gabonese	23	460	530	2.86
Participant 3	M	Gabonese	26	453	490	2.48
Participant 4	M	Gabonese	24	490	507	3.30
Participant 5	F	Gabonese	19	410	470	2.80
Participant 6	M	Gabonese	26	430	500	2.90
Participant 7	M	Korean	34	530	n/a	3.32

In the data above there seems to be a correlation between participants' TOEFL scores and their reported LLS use on the SILL. In the first TOEFL test participants 1 and 7 scored the highest with 527 and 530 respectively. They also reported the highest LLS use: participant 1 had an average SILL score of 4.02 and participant 7 had an average SILL score of 3.32. However, although participant 4 scored low on the first TOEFL (490), he reported one of the highest average SILL scores (3.30) and one would have expected a considerable improvement in this second TOEFL score. However, his second TOEFL score showed a very slight improvement on the first. This indicates that while a correlation does exist between LLS use and English language proficiency, either a larger sample of participants (quantitative approach) or more data, perhaps in the form of learner diaries (qualitative approach), would be necessary to have a clearer idea of the possible role of variables such as motivation.

#### 4.4.4 Cultural and educational background variables

The initial sample of participants in the study was very small with only one Korean and one German participant, making generalisations almost impossible. These two non-Gabonese individuals did, however, play a significant role in building up a picture of the situation I was exploring. A comparison of the reported LLS use per country is presented in Table 4.7 below.

**Table 4.7 Average use of LLS per category and nationality**

SILL section	German	Korean	Gabonese
Memory strategies	3.78	3.67	2.29
Cognitive strategies	4.14	3.29	3.18
Compensation strategies	3.83	3.67	3.63
Metacognitive strategies	4.22	4.89	3.80
Affective strategies	3.17	3.5	2.97
Social strategies	4.83	3.67	2.95
	Averages		



The following themes related to culture and education emerged from the different sources of generated data:

- Both the German and Korean students scored high in the SILL on metacognitive strategy use. This includes strategies such as planning to ensure you have enough time to study English, having clear goals for improving English skills, finding out how to be a better learner of English, and paying attention when someone speaks English. Their reportedly high frequency use in this section was supported by the EFL teacher in the interview, but she tends to cast her interpretation in an essentialist view (*"Definitief, M (participant 1)) se emotional strategies, haar konstante toegewydeheid, dedication, ek wil amper sê dis dieselfde as wat ek sien by S (participant 7) ook. 'n Student soos M en S kom uit culture waar daar's konstante, jy leer aanmekaar..."*).
- From an interview with an EFL teacher and informal discussions with other EFL teachers in the Stellenbosch University EFL programme, I learnt that it was the general impression that Korean and German students use particular LLS more frequently than their Gabonese classmates. The teacher in the interview said that she perceived Germans and Koreans as using cognitive strategies more often than their Gabonese classmates (*"Duitsers en Koreane ken die grammatika en oefen dit; hulle gebruik dit in verskillende situasies en kom vra vir my vrae daaroor"*). Her perception is supported by what the German and Korean participants in this study reported on the SILL: the LLS strategy *"I say or write English words several times"* reported a high frequency of use by the German (5 = Always or almost always true of me) and the Korean (4 = Usually true of me) students. Three of the Gabonese students reported 1 (Never or almost never true of me), while the other two reported 3 (Somewhat true of me) and 4 (Usually true of me).
- Similarly the LLS *"I use flashcards to remember new English words"* elicited higher frequency scores from the German (4 = Usually true of me) and Korean (4 = Usually true of me) students. Four of the five Gabonese students reported the frequency of use as 1 (Never or almost never true of me) and one Gabonese student reported his frequency of use as 3 (Somewhat true of me), which is also not a good indicator of the LLS being used to develop English language proficiency. The EFL teacher mentioned in the interview that Korean and German students seemed to accept more responsibility for their own progress (*M en S kom uit culture...jy leer aanmekaar...*) – including learning a new language. These students realised that using these rote learning LLS would facilitate remembering new information. This is in line with Oxford and Ehrman (1995:365), who argue Asian students favour rote memorisation which is often based on what they have found to be successful in their previous education experiences. It is also valued by their culture.

- A perception that Gabonese students do not have a “good culture of learning”: In my interview with the EFL teacher she said that the Gabonese students did not have a very good culture of learning. I asked her to clarify what she meant by ‘culture of learning’ and she replied:” *with culture of learning I mean that a student understands that what he learns and discovers is firstly his own responsibility and secondly he realises that if he wants to improve his own world, he has to motivate himself to fulfil his potential. He does not wait for someone in front of a class to tell him what he ought to do or for someone in the community to prepare life for him*” (“By leerkultuur bedoel ek dat ‘n leerling verstaan, maar dit wat ek leer en ontdek, nr 1: is my eie verantwoordelikheid; nr. 2: ek wil my eie wêreld daarmee skep en daarom gaan ek my eie potensiaal bereik deur myself te motiveer. Ek wag nie vir iemand wat voor in ‘n klas staan om vir my te sê: ‘Jy moet dit doen’ nie...”). When I asked her to qualify her statement with regard to the Gabonese students, she said that she did not have documentation to prove her statement, but that the EFL teachers (in this programme) shared their experiences of working with Gabonese students with each other. More than a hundred Gabonese students had participated in the EFL programme at Stellenbosch University since 2000. She compared the learning behaviour of Gabonese students to the learning behaviour of Korean and German students. In her view Korean and German students took responsibility for themselves and approached the EFL learning situation from that perspective, while the Gabonese students shifted the responsibility and waited for someone else to take responsibility for their learning of English. This teacher taught EFL in Korea for a number of years, which she views in a very positive light. It is thus possible that she is biased when she compares Gabonese students to Korean students. It is also possible that she does not make sufficient allowance for different learning styles. My eight years of EFL teaching at Stellenbosch University makes it possible for me to understand why essentialist views of this kind develop. I also recognise that there are many factors involved as is evident in the goal-directedness of the Gabonese students hoping to gain admission to an MBA programme (see 4.5.2). It is likely that students’ expectations were influenced by the fact that they come from a strongly teacher-centred educational system in which large classes and transmission learning are the norm. It is ironic that the learner-centred approach espoused by the EFL programme does not make work in terms of accommodating students’ needs but expects students to fit the system.
- Germans and Koreans are perceived as having a “good culture of learning” because they seem to accept responsibility for their own success and work hard to achieve their goals. As the EFL teacher said in her interview: (“...dit sien jy bv. met die Koreaan en die Duitser in die klas: dat hulle alreeds daai stappie geneem het, selfgedrewe, niemand in die society gaan vir hulle iets op skinkbord geskenk gee nie

– *ek moet die impetus aanmekaar... ek moet die wiel aan die rol hou. Ek is die drywer agter die wiel...*” and also “ *...’n Koreaanse student of ’n Duitse student normaalweg of as ek nou sal sê: ek van M (participant 1) praat en S (participant 7)...: hulle selfmotivering was baie hoër as die Gabonese s’n...*”).

- The Korean education system does not favour interaction in class: The teacher I had the interview with recounted a situation in which a Korean woman was asked to supply an oral answer to a very easy question in a class exercise. After it became clear that the student was not going to answer, the teacher asked her if she would prefer not to answer. The student burst into tears. After class, she explained to the teacher that she knew the answer to the language question, but she was not used to speaking in class. In the Korean education system where she was educated such behaviour would have been inappropriate. Students never interrupt or ask questions or speak out aloud in class, because such action would be seen as a waste of other students’ time. Lectures were seen as an opportunity to gain the maximum the lecturer’s information session/lecture. According to the student, students who dared to waste time by asking questions were often abused physically by their peers after class. (“...toe vertel sy vir ons in haar skool as jy durf ’n vraag gevra het of gepraat het in die klas, dan na die skool, dan kry die ander ouens jou. Hulle slaan jou of hulle skel jou vrot uit en abuse you verbally, want jy neem tyd van hulle af weg wat die onderwyser nie vir hulle meer kon leer nie. So die hele sisteem van wat in die klaskamer gebeur, beïnvloed ook watter strategieë ’n student sal toepas. En as ’n student uit ’n sisteem uit kom waar daar die hele tyd net goed op die bord geskryf word en jy moet afskryf, en nou werk ons baie visueel en interaktief, dan raak dit ook daai student...”).

This student’s explanation shed some light as to why we as EFL teachers at Stellenbosch University have found at times that Asian students do not want to participate in group learning activities in EFL classes. It is perhaps surprising that the teacher, who had had taught in Korea did not take into account the fact that the Korean situation does not encourage interaction and so this female student might be reluctant to answer pointed questions. For her the explanation was a simple one: (“*Die Koreaan hou nie van groepwerk nie, because they lose face. Then you can’t face it!*”)

- Different approaches to language learning by different cultures despite their teacher-centred previous experience: I have observed in my EFL classes that German and Korean students tend to approach EFL classes and learning in an analytical way, while Gabonese students prefer the interpersonal interaction and socialisation aspects of learning English. My observations were supported by the EFL teacher I

had the interview with and she remarked that the Gabonese students preferred to participate in speaking and listening activities whereas the German and Korean students preferred reading and writing activities (*"....die Gabonese studente geneigd was, as hulle die geleentheid gekry het en die blootstelling, sou hulle baie makliker informeel gemeng het en gesels het so die praat-luister was vir hulle belangriker, waar lees-skryf strategieë vir die Koreaan en vir die Duitser meer belangrik was in die leerproses. Beide M (participant 1) en al die Gabonese het baie moeite gedoen om deur die loop van die jaar uit hulle comfort zones te kom en met SA studente te kommunikeer..."*).

This does suggest the complexity of finding explanations for student behaviour in their previous educational experience. Like the Korean and German in this study, the Gabonese students learnt their English in classes which emphasise reading and writing and grammar. There is not much opportunity for interpersonal communication in the Gabonese state schools since the classes are rather large.

#### 4.4.5 Motivation and success in language learning

The following themes related to motivation and language learning emerged from the data:

- In the interview with the EFL teacher she commented significantly that the EFL teachers perceived the EFL students as being unmotivated because they did not understand the benefits of English proficiency for their future success (*"En dit was vir ons as personeel by die program vir Engels vir internasionale studente baie duidelik dat die studente ... nie die baie groter prentjie van taal en hoekom hulle hierdie taal gereedskap aanleer en hulle eie toekoms regtig kon sien en verstaan nie en daarom was hulle ongemotiveerd..."*). The teacher's assumption that students' lack of motivation is directly related to their not seeing the bigger picture of the importance of proficiency in English seems an oversimplification of the situation. Many factors such as the degree to which a particular course is viewed by students as relevant to their need and the confidence they have in a particular teacher are at play.
- Mention must be made of the fact that the German participant voluntarily participated in the EFL programme, while the other 6 participants were compelled to do EFL classes. In particular the attitudes and resultant motivation of the German and Korean participants seem very different. The German student portrayed what is known as integrative motivation – she mentioned in my interview with her that she wanted to stay in South Africa permanently and wanted to get to know the English culture. The Korean student in no uncertain terms made me understand that the only reason he was in an EFL class was to gain admission to the M.Th programme at the University, thus his motivation was instrumental.

#### 4.4.6 Teacher-centredness versus learner-centredness

The following themes related to teacher vs. learner centredness emerged from the data:

- Teacher-centredness: In the interview I had with the EFL teacher, she underlined that the teachers in the EFL programme were frustrated because the students in the programme did not seem to take responsibility for their own language improvement (*“en dit was vir ons as personeel by die program vir Engels vir internasionale studente ...baie duidelik dat die studente ‘n baie nou idee gehad het van waarom Engels gaan: dit was die beeld van Eng = handboek en ‘n toets wat jy skryf of ‘n eksamen en ‘n klaskamer en as jy hier uitstap dan is Engels nou verby...”*). I think it is likely that the frustration could have been experienced by both sides – teachers and students – because their expectations of the EFL programme were different. Teachers were waiting for learners to take initiative, while students were waiting for teachers to feed them knowledge. The very different dynamic in the Teacher Education programme shows that given the opportunity, Gabonese students do take responsibility for their own learning.
- The culture of learning is teacher-centred in Gabon, while it is more learner-centred at Stellenbosch University: I have already mentioned that the EFL teachers generally believed that Gabonese students do not have a very good culture of learning (see 4.4.4), but I think this is a misreading. Gabonese teacher education students in the investigation seemed to have a clear understanding of the notion that their learning had to be initiated by themselves as opposed to the other participants in the study. The following statements are taken from the focus group interviews held with the Gabonese English teacher education students: *“For me the way to learn English is the direct one. I learn as we have contact with the language itself like when you practise to speak it...”*; *“The good way to learn English is to have contact with the natives. To share English sounds and have conversation, read the newspaper where you going to get some words and you have to avoid any contact with Gabonese ...”*; *I spend my time listening to radio + watching TV and I meet natives through soccer. I go out to look for Eng people en just interaction most of the time...*; *“...First it is possible to learn how to use vocabulary. I look at new words in the dictionary. I ask native speakers about words. And I practice to combine different structures. I listen to TV and radio and to people speaking. I read the newspaper every day...”*; *“...I Think the best way to learn English is through exposure, because English is a living language...”*. This difference in approach to learning between the two groups of Gabonese students (EFL group vs. Education group) can be attributed to the fact that the students in the Education group were thoroughly briefed by their lecturer on the

differences between the primary educational approaches in Gabon and at Stellenbosch University.

- Different learning styles or preferences within the group: A few of the Gabonese English teachers did mention that they relied on the teacher to improve their English: “...*I think the good way to learn the new language is to be explained English as much as possible...*”. This provides some indication that learners have their own sets of beliefs and preferences. Even in a situation where they are being stretched beyond their stylistic boundaries, they may want to retain ways of learning which are directly related to culturally inculcated values (Oxford, 2002).

#### 4.4.7 Gender differences in language learning

The following themes related to gender and language learning emerged from the data generated:

- The women in this investigation generally scored lower overall on LLS use: average SILL score for males is 3.305 and for females 3.156. If the German female participant's score is removed from the equation, the average score for female participants is even lower at 2.984.
- The EFL teacher in the interview mentioned that females in EFL classes generally tended to be more reserved and did not display as many LLS in class as their male classmates and she linked this to certain cultures (“*Trouens Koreaanse vrouens oor die algemeen word geleer om baie meer terughoudend te wees as mans, baie meer reserved uit confusionisme...*”)

#### 4.4.8 Age in language learning

The Korean and German students reported a higher use of metacognitive language learning strategies than their Gabonese classmates. It is interesting to note that these two participants were also much older than the 5 Gabonese participants (the Korean was 34 and the German 41, while the ages of the Gabonese participants ranged from 19-26 years) and their greater use of metacognitive strategies could be attributed to more exposure to educational situations in general.

#### 4.4.9 Individual learner factors

From the various data generated the following themes relating to individual factors emanated:

- The Korean student in this research clearly communicated to me during the short interview I had with him when he completed the SILL questionnaire that he wanted to improve his English to obtain a Masters degree in Theology at Stellenbosch



University. He had no interest in being able to use English beyond his studies for this particular degree. His motivation to attend the EFL programme can thus be described as instrumental – he needed the English to achieve his goal of getting into the M.Th programme at Stellenbosch University.

- The interview with the EFL teacher also touched on this issue when she told me that she found the majority of the male Korean students very reluctant to socialise and mix with other students and very unwilling to cooperate when she taught language learning strategies beyond their learning style. She said that they were merely interested in obtaining the required score on the TOEFL test so that they would be formally accepted into Theological studies.
- The teacher, however, also mentioned that she had two younger Korean male students who were very open to socialising and learning new language learning skills suggested by the teacher in class. Exceptions like these should always remind the EFL teacher that cultural stereotyping is dangerous and that learners remain individuals with individual needs.
- A number of EFL teachers commented on the German participant's drive to improve her English – it was so noticeable that teachers always discussed her when they got together. Her motivation to acquire English skills can be described as integrative – she wanted to get the whole package that came with the language. She planned on establishing herself in South Africa and wanted to incorporate the culture and the English language into her life. Nobody had to motivate her to learn as much English as possible.
- Different students seem to concentrate on different ways of learning English – even when they are from the same gender and the same cultural and educational backgrounds. One Gabonese male teacher said: *"...I can say that grammar is the best way to learn a foreign language. Why? Because to me language, grammar is the rule of language and you cannot use it without any rules. So why grammar, because grammar is a kind of what you may call intensified course. Grammar you can listen and come across new words. You start to learn to know how to use it in a sentence and then you learn how to use the language"*, while other comments from Gabonese male teachers were: *"...I learnt differently (and not grammar only). You know at school we only studied grammar. In addition to that I also had some friends that are English speakers and at school we had English clubs. We were exposed to language there, but elsewhere we spoke only French and I also can say that when I was young I like to listen the music and through listening to the music I learnt many things..."* and *"....that I also learnt English through music. So in Gabon I was singing myself. The music I usually listen and sing is rap music and I was listening exactly what these rappers were saying in the text so each time I took a text I tried to write what*



*they were saying even if the pronunciation was not always clear, but just to imitate them the way they were doing and this is exactly the way I learnt and you see my dictionary I used when I found new words and I found the words in the dictionary..."*

## **4.5 DISCUSSION OF THEMES AND LINKS WITH LITERATURE**

### **4.5.1 Cultural and educational differences in LLS use**

Research suggests that cultural background related to ethnicity and nationality plays a role in the use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Hispanics and Asians were found to differ substantially in the kinds of strategies they used for language learning: Hispanics preferred social, interactive strategies while Asians preferred rote memorisation. These preferences are believed to be dictated by their previous educational experiences (Bedell, 1993 as mentioned in Oxford & Ehrman, 1995:365). In this research the Asian (Korean) participant was found to show a preference for the use of rote memorisation language learning strategies. This was clear from his self-reported LLS use on the SILL and it was also explicitly mentioned by the EFL teacher in my interview. The same would apply to the German participant in this research but I could find no other literature that made specific mention of the learning preferences of Germans in an EFL class.

Some of the behaviour of the Korean and Gabonese students in this study is derived from a particular set of assumptions. The strongly teacher-centred approach they are familiar with often goes along with a transmission model of learning: the teacher transmits the knowledge and the learner receives the knowledge. The learner is thus essentially passive in the language learning process. This teacher-centred model has two major drawbacks: firstly, it creates few opportunities for active interaction and secondly, it gives students knowledge about the language, but does not necessarily enable them to use it for purposes that interest them. To overcome these drawbacks, many language teaching professionals have adopted a different model of teaching and learning. Language learning classes thus differ sharply from those that focus almost exclusively on reading, writing and grammar, and are very examinations driven. The teacher's role is to model language use and facilitate students' development of language skills. In this learner-centred model, both learner and teacher are active participants who share responsibility for the learner's learning. Instructor and students work together to identify how students expect to use the language. The teacher models correct and appropriate language use and the learners then use the language themselves in practice activities that simulate real communication situations. The active, joint engagement of learners and teacher leads to a dynamic classroom environment in which teaching and learning become rewarding and enjoyable. This is, however, an environment that students

from an educational context that values teacher-centred approaches may find strange and threatening.

As Saracella and Oxford (1992) point out strategy training is particularly useful in helping students stretch beyond their normal stylistic boundaries. Learning styles are regarded to be general and enduring tendencies or preferences a person displays with regard to the way in which new knowledge is acquired and differentiate one person from another or one group of people from another group (Brown, 1994:192). While learning styles should not be confused with learning strategies (Brown, 1994:192), learning styles often dictate the learning strategies students employ. Where it would usefully serve to promote language acquisition, students should be taught certain learning strategies which could alter their learning styles (Oxford, 2002). If the EFL teacher is aware of the cultural and educational background of students in class, special attention can be given to teaching students LLSs which are not common to their cultures and or valued in their educational systems.

#### **4.5.2 Motivation and LLS use**

The fact that six (5 Gabonese and 1 Korean) of the seven participants in this study did not elect to do the EFL programme could have affected their levels of motivation during the classes. The teachers who were interviewed considered the students approach to the programme was negative citing poor class attendance and class participation as evidence of this. The teachers involved reported that students did only what was absolutely required and attended irregularly. However, this was not my experience when I taught the EFL course for Gabonese students who were seeking admission to the MBA at Stellenbosch University. These prospective MBA students attended their classes regularly and even asked to be given extra homework exercises. During our class discussions I learnt that it was a great honour for them to be admitted to Stellenbosch University's Business School.

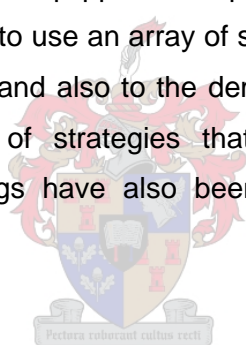
As has been argued elsewhere, instrumental motivation is a valuable factor in successful language learning, although integrative motivation seems to more successful in long-term development of proficiency (Ellis 1997). In the case of the Gabonese students in my EFL preparation course, mentioned above, instrumental motivation proved valuable in the language learning situation.

#### **4.5.3 Relationship between language proficiency and LLS use**

As indicated in Chapter 2, various studies have indicated that there is a positive relationship between language learning strategies and the different levels of language proficiency of students (Dreyer, 2002; Kamper et al, 2003; Phakiti, 2003, Purpura, 1997). In most of these studies more proficient language learners (as measured on standardised proficiency tests)

reported higher or more frequent LLS use (Dreyer, 2000; Kamper et al., 2003) and more proficient language learners generally used a greater variety of LLS more often (Dreyer, 2000; Green & Oxford, 1995; Kamper et al, 2003; Purpura, 1997). This investigation found a relationship between LLS use and level of English language proficiency and what I thus found in my data above is consistent with the findings of Dreyer, (2002); Green and Oxford (1995), and Kamper et al (2003) that students with a higher level of language proficiency generally reported using language learning strategies of all kinds more than students with a lower level of language proficiency.

Previous research indicates a significant relationship between the use of LLS and the development of **second language proficiency** in adult learners (Dreyer, 2000; Mahlobo, 1999:104; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995:378; Phakiti, 2003; Purpura, 1997; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995b). Research however also suggests that there is no single pattern of strategy use employed by all effective language learners (Skehan, 1989; Vann & Abraham, 1990). Generally, language learners who are able to use a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately are better equipped to improve their language skills (Fedderholdt, 1997). Successful learners seem to use an array of strategies, matching them to their unique personalities and learning styles and also to the demands of the learning situation. Optimal learners develop combinations of strategies that work for them (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995:362). All the above findings have also been found to be supported by the data generated in this investigation.



## 4.6 REFLECTIONS

When I set out to do this research I anticipated using a clearly set out “formula” to measure English proficiency on the one hand and the use of language learning strategies on the other, so that I could determine the relationship between the two sets of data to find a recipe that would guarantee English language proficiency if followed rigidly. This did not happen and instead of my intended more structured, quantitative approach the data generated forced me into a rather unstructured, qualitative approach to the investigation. This was a novel experience for me and I had to learn to use the data that I obtained to form a picture of the situation I was investigating. I learnt that credible qualitative research does not allow itself to be dictated by a researcher, but instead dictates the process as data patterns unfold. My role was to facilitate the data that emerged naturally during the investigative process so that a realistic picture of the situation could be portrayed.

In my literature survey I learnt that regardless of language learning experience, most learners need instruction in 'how' to use strategies efficiently as a way to improve language learning and performance (Cohen, 1998:69; O'Malley & Chamot, 1995:81). One way to direct learners

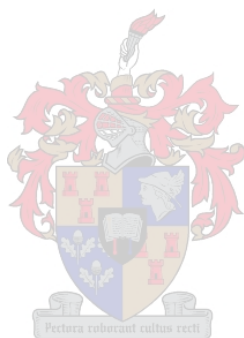
towards the efficient use of learning strategies is to integrate language learning strategy instruction with regular language lessons. Through language learning strategy instruction the language teacher aims to raise learner awareness of learning strategies and provide learners with systematic practice, reinforcement and self-monitoring of their strategy use while attending to language learning activities. The underlying assumption of strategy instruction is, if learners explore 'how', 'when' and 'why' to use language learning strategies, and evaluate and monitor their own learning (Cohen, 1998:69), then they can take a more active role in the language learning process. In becoming active participants in the learning process, learners can become more efficient and positive in their approach to learning. This will enable learners to take a procedural approach to language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995:145), which is likely to have a positive effect on motivation levels, self-efficacy, learner autonomy, transfer skills and thus language proficiency is likely to result.

An important part of mastering any new knowledge or skill, which would include mastering a new language, is mastering the skill of learning. Mastering the fundamentals of learning is indispensable in aiding language learners to consolidate vocabulary, acquire basic structures, and accumulate the necessary linguistic and communication skills, and such mastery of learning skills furthermore puts the learner in active control of his own learning processes – learner-centred learning instead of teacher-centred learning. This process of achieving success in learning nurtures autonomous learners with individualised approaches to specific learning objectives. An approach that includes conscious consideration of the learning process and mastery of the language syllabus content contributes not only to more effective mastery of the specific content in the traditional educational setting, but also facilitates the development of lifelong learners: not only in language learning, but also in other areas that require metacognition. However, cultural background, gender and motivation have been found to have a significant effect on approaches to learning (Dreyer, 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Nisbet, 2003; Oxford, 1996; Oxford, Ehrman & Nyikos, 1988; Skehan, 1991). The influence of cultural background, and set beliefs with regard to education, on students' approaches to learning was very evident in this investigation. Gabonese participants in this investigation tended to stress the seminal role of the teacher or educator in any learning process, including the language learning process. This seems to stem from their educational experience in Gabon.

The Korean teaching situation is strongly teacher-centred. I learnt from Korean students in my EFL classes (and this was confirmed by an EFL teacher at Stellenbosch University who had taught English in Korea) that students in the Korean education system are not to interrupt any teacher or lecturer by asking questions in class. Fellow students regard it a waste of their time when a student asks a question or interrupts the teacher who is passing on the knowledge to the students. I regard this predominantly teacher-centred orientation in

language learning a factor that can negatively affect motivation and learner autonomy, which are major factors in effective language learning (Dadour & Robbins, 1996 and Nyikos, 1996).

This chapter has touched on the complexity involved when dealing with individuals. Even though responses from participants were gained from self-reports, the information on LLS use does not necessarily reflect a true picture of the situation. The EFL teachers' versions of how the participants learn English might also not be an accurate version of reality, but if one puts all the data together like the pieces of a puzzle, it constructs a unique reality which aids the understanding of the EFL situation at Stellenbosch University.



# **CHAPTER 5**

## **REFLECTIONS ON KNOWLEDGE GAINED**

“It has been realised that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself.”

(Nunan, 1991:228).

### **5.1 FRAMEWORK OF REFLECTIONS**

In this chapter I intend to reflect on what I have learnt from this study which could inform my future EFL classroom practice and my future research in EFL curriculum development. I will focus on the expression of personal knowledge gained and how theory and previous research have gained meaning and provided a greater understanding for me.

To do this, the first section consists of my reflections on what I have learnt about the relationship between LLS use and English second/foreign language proficiency. This section will refer to the research problem posed at the outset of this research. The second section will focus on the implications of this research for my future EFL classroom practice. It will contain a proposed curriculum amendment for EFL at Stellenbosch University. Lastly, I will elaborate on the things I would do differently if I were to do this research again and I will reflect on what I have learnt about research – and qualitative research in particular.

### **5.2 PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE GAINED**

What I have first and foremost learnt from my engagement in this research project, is summed up very aptly by Nunan (1991) in the extract at the top of this page – students are individuals and there is no one method of learning that suits all students. Research has indicated that not all successful language learners exhibit the same characteristics with regard to learning styles and the use of learning strategies (Brown, 1994:192). Chamot and Kupper (1989 cited in Skehan, 1991:187-188) contend that good learners might not necessarily be distinguished from bad learners by the number of strategies employed, but by the flexibility and appropriateness with which strategies are used. All learners use strategies, but good learners choose the strategies most suitable for the occasion. Students all learn in different ways, using different learning strategies and different combinations of these.

Researchers have however found a relationship between the use of a variety of language learning strategies (albeit in different combinations according to the student's preference) and the development of English language proficiency (Brown, 1994; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Dreyer, 2000; Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; Nisbet, 2003; O'Maley & Chamot, 1990 & 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995a:309) mention that they have found that the more proficient the student is in a language, the higher the frequency and variation of strategy use when using and developing that language. They further state that a relationship has been found between the personal background of a student and his strategy use. More experienced learners tend to apply LLSs more beneficially than those who have less experience in learning situations. Based on the above information, I have come to the conclusion that the EFL curriculum and the EFL class should include training to assist the learner in improving his decision-making skills and thus learn the target language (English) more successfully. This would further require the EFL teacher to introduce the class to as many LLSs as possible so that learners can find out which LLSs work best for them.

This research was conducted against the background of similar research done by various other researchers (Mahlobo, 1999; Dreyer, 2000; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford, 1990:8; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a & 1995b) who documented the significant relationship between the use of LLS and the development of English second language proficiency. These researchers have found LLSs to be significant in the development of all four the language skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing. These strategies work in a general way (e.g. metacognitive strategies help learners regulate their own cognition and to plan and evaluate their language learning progress) and these strategies also work in specific ways (e.g. cognitive strategies which would include deductive reasoning to improve grammatical accuracy in language learning) (Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a:307). Social strategies (which include practising English with others and asking for help and correction when speaking English) as well as compensation strategies (which include making guesses when you are unfamiliar with words and making up new words when you don't know the right ones) have been found to be effective when students used them to develop speaking and listening skills (Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a). The development of writing skills was enhanced by using metacognitive LLSs which include gaining information on how to learn and the planning of learning activities accordingly and also the self-monitoring of progress (Oxford, & Nyikos, 1989 as cited in Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003:174; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a)



### 5.3 REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the above section of this chapter I reflected on the knowledge I gained through this research. I will now draw on this knowledge to address the research question I posed in Chapter 1, namely:

*What is the nature of the relationship between language learning strategies and effective language production as measured in a standardised test of language proficiency (TOEFL) in a group of 7 students at Stellenbosch University?*

This research question was divided into four more specific questions and I will use these as a framework for my response to the research question.

- **What complex of language learning strategies is used by each of the seven learners, and how were the strategies used?**

Each of the participants in this study reported using a unique set of language learning strategies in the sense that it was different from that of the other participants. I will expand on the LLS use of each of the participants, starting with the participant who reported the highest frequency of LLS use on the SILL and ending with the participant who recorded the lowest frequency of LLS use on the SILL.

On the SILL, participant 1 (German, female) reported the highest frequency of use in the social strategies section (4.83), followed by the use of metacognitive strategies (4.22) and the use of cognitive strategies (4.14). During her individual interview, I learnt from this participant that she was set on living in South Africa permanently. She was determined to learn English well and integrate into the English-speaking society. It is thus understandable that she chose to use social LLSs (e.g. "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers" = 5; "I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk" = 5) optimally. Also her high frequency of the use of metacognitive LLSs reflects her conscious attempt at improving her English proficiency when she reports high frequency of use (5) on actions such as "I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English", "I pay attention when someone is speaking English" and "I look for people I can talk to in English". The participant's reported frequent use of cognitive strategies (frequency = 5 on the SILL) such as "I say or write new English words several times", "I start conversations in English" and "I read for pleasure in English" are in line with what the teacher reported about the participant during the interview I had with the EFL teacher: "this student takes responsibility for what she wants to achieve in life. She is set on improving her English proficiency and will draw on her knowledge about learning and learning methods to assist her in achieving her goal". This participant also reported a high average use on the SILL (4.02) which suggests that she would attempt many different

methods to reach her goal. Research has reported higher scores on language proficiency tests when the reported overall average frequency of strategy use on the SILL is high (Dreyer, 2000; Mahlobo, 1999; O'Maley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper & Russo, 1989; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a) and in this study this participant reported the highest average frequency of LLS use on the SILL and she also scored second best (527) on the TOEFL (the best TOEFL score was 530, which is not much higher than her score).

Participant 7 (Korean, male) reported the highest frequency of use in the SILL on metacognitive strategies (4.89), followed by memory strategies, compensation strategies and social strategies (all 3.67). It is thus very obvious that this participant has a strong preference for the use of metacognitive strategies which include strategies such as "I pay attention when someone is speaking English", "I try to find out how to be a better learner of English", "I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English" and "I have clear goals for improving my English skills". The participant reported his frequency of use on all the aforementioned strategies to be 5 (*Always or almost always true of me*). His portrayal of himself and his preferences with regard to language learning are in line with what the EFL teacher reported during the interview I had with her. She observed him to be very focussed on learning English, but in the way that he was accustomed to. He would go as far as to confront the teacher if she used teaching and learning methods in class which he did not agree with, e.g. expressing one's feelings with regard to language learning and sharing these feelings with others in your class and also correcting each other in class when English mistakes were made. This participant then also reported a low frequency of use (2 "Usually not true of me" and 3 "Somewhat true of me") of the strategies "I write down my feelings in a language learning diary", "I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English" and "I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk". From the interview I had with this participant I learnt that he was in the EFL class in order to get the minimum required score on the TOEFL so that he could gain full admission to the Masters degree in Theology at Stellenbosch University. He was not interested in socialising with English speaking people or in their culture. He wanted to be able to read and write in English so that he could prepare and present a Masters thesis. His attitude towards English was mirrored in this TOEFL proficiency test: he scored lower in the listening section (section 1) where he obtained a score of 49, while he scored 55 in each of the other two sections, written expression and reading comprehension.

Participant 4 (Gabonese, male) reported an average frequency of LLS use of 3.30 on the SILL, which is not significantly lower than that of participant 7, who reported a frequency of 3.32 on the SILL. Participant 4 did however score significantly lower than participant 7 on the TOEFL test with 490 as opposed to participant 7's 530 on the TOEFL. This participant

reported the highest frequency of use in the social strategies section (4.67), followed by the metacognitive strategies section (4.56) and the cognitive strategies section and the compensation strategies section (both 4.00). Although participant 4 scored very similarly to participant 7 on the overall SILL, I would attribute participant 7's higher score on the TOEFL language proficiency test to his very high reported score on the use of metacognitive strategies. Participant 7 appears (from SILL and TOEFL scores and also from classroom observation and my interview with him) to be more focussed in his approach to learning English when compared to participant 4. This could most probably be attributed to participant 7's educational background in Korea. Participant 4's performance can also probably be attributed to his educational and social backgrounds where responsibility for one's progress is not emphasised as harshly as one would find in for example Korea.

Participant 6 (Gabonese, male) reported the highest frequency of use on the SILL in compensation strategies (3.67), cognitive strategies (3.50) and metacognitive strategies (3.44). His overall reported score on the SILL (2.90) is rated medium (refer to table 4.4, section 4.4.2) and strengthens the argument that there is a relationship between lower frequency LLS use on average and performance on a language proficiency test – the participant obtained a TOEFL score of 430 in July 2004. Remarkably though, this participant did improve his TOEFL score and obtained a score of 500 in the October 2004 TOEFL test. This participant recorded a 5 (Always or almost always true of me) on only one of the fifty LLSs in the SILL, viz. "I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them (memory strategy)". He did however report many 4's (Usually true of me) on a variety of LLSs which include "I say or write new English words several times" (cognitive strategy), "I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English" (compensation strategy); "I try to find out how to be a better learner of English" (metacognitive strategy) and "If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again" (social strategy). This participant was admitted to the Science faculty at Stellenbosch University in 2005.

Participant 2 (Gabonese, male) reported the highest frequency of use on the SILL in the social strategies (3.67), followed by compensation strategies (3.33) and metacognitive strategies (3.22). This participant recorded a 5 (Always or almost always true of me) on only two of the fifty LLS in the SILL, viz. "I practice English with other students" (an affective LLS) and "I try not to translate word-for-word" (a cognitive LLS) and interestingly enough neither of these strategies were in any of the three sections of strategies wherein he reported the highest frequency of use. This participant reported the lowest frequency of use in the memory strategies section and it appears that his attitude towards the development of his English proficiency skills is one of making no conscious effort from his side to promote the language learning process. His academic background was such that he could not be

admitted to Stellenbosch University and he was accepted into a Public Relations Diploma at CPUT. It could thus be that his general learning style, personality factors and academic background also contributed to poor performance in the English language proficiency test as well as his report of a mediocre use of LLSs.

Participant 5 (Gabonese, female) had the highest reported SILL scores in metacognitive strategies (4.33), compensation strategies (3.67) and affective strategies (3.67). This is also the participant who scored the lowest on the TOEFL in July 2004 (410) and on the October 2004 TOEFL (470) although she did show a notable improvement in her score on the English proficiency test. From this participant's SILL, I have come to the conclusion that she is very adamant about her actions: most of her responses to the statements were 1 (Never or almost never true of me) or 5 (Always or almost always true of me). She used a 3 (Somewhat true of me) in only two of the fifty statements. She reported frequent use (5, which is *Always or almost always true of me*) on LLSs including the following: "I use the English words I know in different ways" (cognitive strategy), "I read English without looking up every new word" (compensation strategy), "I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English" (metacognitive strategy) and "I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake" (affective strategy). This participant's many scores of 1 (Never or almost never true of me) in the memory strategies section are somewhat disturbing and could explain to some extent why she was still lacking in English proficiency. She recorded a 1 (Never or almost never true of me) on strategies such as "I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English", "I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word", and "I use flashcards to remember new English words". In the personal interview I had with her, she said that her best language learning experience so far had been the day when she did not have to ask her English boyfriend to explain in simpler language what he was trying to say to her. She felt a sense of accomplishment and she was very proud of what she had achieved. This participant did score high on metacognitive strategy use on average, including the strategy "I find as many ways as I can to use my English" (which could be why she chose an English boyfriend) and her approach to learning language could be submersion in an attempt to get to know the language in a natural way. This student's academic background afforded her admission to a diploma programme at CPUT in 2005.

Participants 2, 5 and 6 (Gabonese, 2 males and 1 female) all reported very similar scores on the SILL on average. Participant 6 reported a score of 2.90, participant 2 reported a score of 2.86 and participant 5 reported a score of 2.80. Their TOEFL English proficiency scores were however not particularly similar – not in the July 2004 TOEFL test and also not in the October 2004 TOEFL test. Participant 2 scored 460 on the TOEFL in July 2004 (SILL average =

2.86), participant 6 scored 430 on the TOEFL in July 2004 (SILL average = 2.9) and participant 5 scored 410 on the TOEFL in July 2004 (the lowest TOEFL score for all 7 participants), while her SILL average was 2.80. The above sample of three participants all share a common educational, cultural and social background and are all between the ages of 19 and 26 and yet their reported average LLS use does not correlate directly with their performance on the TOEFL test. These participants also reported the use of very different combinations of LLSs. Although this sample is very small, one can, however, come to the conclusion that frequency of LLS use (or the learner's reported frequency of LLS use) does not necessarily guarantee success in a language proficiency test. At best one can conclude that there is a significant relationship between average LLS use and performance in a language proficiency test.

Participant 3 (Gabonese, male) reported the lowest frequency of LLS use on the SILL by far – an average of 2.48, which makes him the only participant to fall in the “LOW” category as explained in table 4.4 in section 4.4.2. The overall description for his LLS use would be “Generally not used”. This participant did however score high frequency use in one LLS section, viz. compensation strategies (3.50) and medium on metacognitive strategies (3.44) and on social strategies (3.00). It is interesting to note that during the personal interview I had with him he responded to the question “Do you enjoy learning English?” with “more or less”. I got the impression that he did not like the language learning situation, but at the same time he realised that he needed a certain proficiency in English to be able to study at Stellenbosch University. My observation seems to be supported by the fact that he recorded only one 5 (Always or almost always true of me) and it was on the strategy “I try to find out how to be a better learner of English” (metacognitive strategy). In our interview he showed a positive attitude towards the EFL classes, but he seemed somewhat overwhelmed by the huge task of developing an adequate proficiency in English to be able to study effectively on postgraduate level. This student was admitted into postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University in 2005.

The participants who scored the highest marks overall in the TOEFL English language proficiency test, reported high scores on the SILL overall, but they also reported high scores on the metacognitive strategies section of the SILL. Participant 7 scored 530 on the TOEFL and reported a frequency of 4.89 (out of a possible 5.00) on the use of metacognitive strategies. Participant 1 scored second best on the TOEFL, 527, and reported a frequency of use of 4.22 on the metacognitive strategy section of the SILL. Participant 4 scored 490 on the TOEFL and reported a frequency of use of 4.56 on the metacognitive strategies in the SILL. This coincides with research findings that learners are more successful at developing language proficiency when cognitive strategies are combined with metacognitive strategies

(Brown, 1994; O'Malley, et.al., 1989). During our interview, the EFL teacher also made explicit mention of the fact that the participants in this research who were showing progress in the EFL class, were those who accepted responsibility for their own learning – those who employed metacognitive LLSs.

The participants in this study tended to use strategies most frequently when the language tasks (e.g. memorisation, rote learning and listening) were not very complex e.g. the German participant reported a 5 (*Always or almost always true of me*) on the strategies “I say or write new English words several times” and on “I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them” and “I pay attention when someone is speaking English”. The Korean participant reported 4 (Usually true of me) on strategies such as “I use flashcards to remember new English words”; “I say or write new English words several times” and “I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them”. All five the Gabonese students as well as the German and the Korean participants reported high frequency use (4 or 5) of the strategy “I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English. This was in line with the research findings of O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper and Russo (1985). Their study was conducted for the US Army Research Institute for Behavioural and Social Sciences and was designed to identify language learning strategies students could use to improve second language learning and retention. Their participants were predominantly Spanish speaking and were studying English as a second language at beginners and intermediate levels.

It is evident from the information above that all seven participants in this research study use a different combination of LLSs. The only relationship between LLS use and English proficiency seems to be that the greater the average use of LLSs, the higher the score on the standardised English proficiency test (compare participants 1 and 7 to the rest of the participants). No single strategy or set of strategies have shown a relationship to performance on the English language proficiency test (TOEFL) used in this study.

▪ **What similarities and differences are there (in the language learning strategies they use) between the German, Korean and Gabonese students?**

Similarities and differences noted between German, Korean and Gabonese students in this study should be regarded to be preliminary observations since the sample is so small (1 German participant, 1 Korean participant and 5 Gabonese participants) and since observations were based on an interview with only one EFL teacher as well as on my own perceptions as an EFL teacher at Stellenbosch University. A bigger sample of participants and interviews with more EFL teachers would have shed more light on the similarities and differences between students of different nationalities. Observations of students in EFL



classes have however presented patterns of preferred LLS use in students from different countries. Germans and Koreans have for example, been found to be very analytical, organised and focussed in the language learning process, relying heavily on the use of cognitive as well as metacognitive LLSs. They have also been observed to often ignore the use of affective LLSs. In the case of the Korean student this could probably be as a result of their culture of learning and their education system where emotions are separated from the learning situation. The emphasis is also on individualism and competitiveness in these two cultures – German and Korean – and this is evident in their approach to the language learning situation where they seldom volunteer to participate in group work. These students have furthermore been found to be rather demanding and intolerant when EFL classes were not presented in the way they preferred.

Gabonese students have been observed to use more affective and social LLSs than both German and Korean students. They clearly have a preference for collaboration and prefer to work in a group. Once again their preference could be derived from their culture and their educational background where the emphasis is not on individualism, but a socially oriented system encouraging individuals to work together – and learn together. Gabonese students prefer to learn with other people and like to share their feelings about the learning situation.

The one section of LLSs in the SILL where the Gabonese students reported significantly lower frequency of use when compared to the German and the Korean students, is in the use of memory strategies.



It is very difficult to comment on obvious similarities in the use of LLSs between these groups of students (Germans, Koreans and Gabonese) with the limited data available in this study. I do not see a clear pattern of similarities between the different nationalities. Participant 3 (Gabonese, male) and participant 7 (Korean, male) do however have one thing in common: their main reason for developing their proficiency in English is to obtain a postgraduate degree at Stellenbosch University. They are not interested in using English beyond this goal.

▪ **What factors seem to underlie successful performance (a score of 550 or more) in the TOEFL test?**

According to previous research (O'Maley, Chamot, Stewner-Mazanares, Kupper & Russo, 1989) and based on the findings in this research study, no particular LLS or group of LLSs (Oxford, 1990) can be said to guarantee success in an English proficiency test. It does, however, seem that greater use of a combination of language learning strategies result in greater proficiency in English when measured on a standardised language proficiency test (Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003). Previous research has also suggested that much of



the reported failure in transferring LLSs to new language tasks can be attributed to learners' failure to combine metacognitive learning strategies (e.g. self-monitoring and planning) with cognitive learning strategies (which include repetition, identification of patterns, rhyming) (Brown, 1994; O'Maley, et al, 1989).

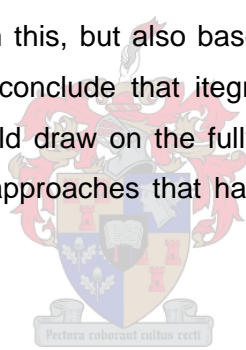
In this investigation factors other than LLS were also found to have contributed to success in language learning, and greater success in performance in English tests. Cultural and educational backgrounds influenced, to a large extent, whether learners in the EFL programmes engaged in certain LLSs or not. The Korean participant in this study, for example, was not eager to engage in social learning strategies. In my interview with him, I found it difficult to understand him; his application of social learning strategies could have assisted him in improving his English speaking skills. For the German participant the use of social learning strategies was unfamiliar, but when she started using them she reported that they had assisted her to improve her English speaking skills. The initial 5 Gabonese participants all reported high use of metacognitive strategies on the SILL (scores of more than 3). This did not accord with their teacher's perception. In my experience of teaching Gabonese students in the EFL programme, I found they lacked the confidence to work autonomously and tended to depend strongly on me. My perception was shared by many of the other EFL teachers with whom I had discussions. Research by Ridge (2006) may explain what we, as EFL teachers, experienced in teaching Gabonese students whose levels of English were inadequate as judged on the TOEFL test. She found that most Gabonese high school students were passive in the learning situation, seldom asking questions or volunteering answers. This appeared to result from their school teachers' tendency to favour transmission learning, which did not encourage students to develop the skills to manage their own language learning in their educational system. On the basis of her observations in school classrooms, she reported that a closed view of language learning was privileged, creating the view that there was only one correct answer to a classroom activity even when there was the possibility of interpreting situations and texts. It should be noted once more, however, that the success of the teacher education students shows the danger of essentialising particular students' behaviour.

▪ **What changes should be made to the English language (EFL) courses for international students at Stellenbosch University?**

Many changes can be suggested for the EFL courses for international students at Stellenbosch University, but I will respond to this question briefly with regard to LLS use. It is important to read the suggestions made here in conjunction with 5.5 where more detailed attention is given to recommended changes.

There is a significant difference in the reported LLS use between my initial 5 Gabonese students and the 22 Gabonese students who participated in the teacher education programme. It is interesting to note that the group of 22 students completed the SILL 6 weeks after their arrival into their programme at Stellenbosch University. The group of 5 EFL Gabonese students started EFL classes in February and completed the SILL in August of the same year, which means that this group had been exposed to the South African/Stellenbosch way of teaching for a longer time than their peers in the teacher education. What seems more significant is the facilitative approach adopted in the teacher education programme.

In the EFL programme conscious attention to LLSs did not form part of the programme. According to the EFL teachers, the only conscious effort was by the teacher I interviewed (as an optional extra in the afternoons 5 months into the EFL programme that extended over a year). On the other hand, the group of 22 Gabonese who were in the teacher education programme had LLS use (and other useful skills which included an explanation of differences between teacher-centred and learner-centred educational approaches) integrated into their programme from the start. From this, but also based on much previous research (Oxford, 1996; Cohen, 1998), I have to conclude that integrating LLSs into the EFL curriculum is essential. The programme should draw on the fully-integrated curriculum-based language learning strategies instructional approaches that have been developed (e.g. Oxford, 1996; Cohen, 1998).



## 5.4 LIMITATIONS

One of the major limitations of the investigation is the small sample of initial participants. I originally also considered the large component of Gabonese participants (five of the seven participants) to be a limitation, but I realised that it was actually a component that added positively to the investigation, because I was able to draw more generalisations with regard to the learning behaviour of Gabonese students in the EFL programme. This led me to have focus group interviews with another group of Gabonese students and this action enriched the data generated.

Another limitation of the study is that I was unable to present my findings to the participants for comment once I had completed the entire investigation. Four of the participants moved away at the end of 2004 and the other three were no longer involved in the EFL programme, thus I was unable to meet face to face for concluding interviews. Their input could have strengthened my study and would have made the research more participatory. These primary participants provided limited data and I was unable to access them after 2004, but

this was addressed through the use of 22 other Gabonese students at Stellenbosch University.

This study could also have been emancipatory, but while I gained much insight into the difficulties EFL students at Stellenbosch University experience in learning English, I cannot say that I emancipated or empowered the participants or any other parties. At best I provided a forum where they could air their views and express their feelings and concerns.

The initial plan was to do action research and to intervene by teaching students language learning strategies that they were not *au fait* with already in an attempt to increase their acquisition of English language skills in the EFL class. Unfortunately this did not work out as intended and I never provided intervention through language learning strategy instruction. However, one of the EFL teachers I interviewed did provide LLS training after the participants took the TOEFL test in July 2004. This was however not integrated into the EFL classroom and syllabus: EFL students could attend voluntary afternoon sessions on language learning strategies and motivational topics. Of the seven participants in this study, six took the TOEFL test again in October 2004. All of them improved their scores very slightly (between 2% and 10 %). This can most probably be attributed to the fact that the students knew what to expect in the test the second time round.

While I acknowledge completely that this study has limitations, I have gained valuable insight into some aspects of qualitative research. One of the most important lessons I have learnt is that qualitative research can be very messy and that it normally does not proceed according to the initial plan – the plan has to be altered throughout according to the data available. I also realised that action research using language learning strategies needs to be planned carefully, because there are also so many factors other than language learning strategies at play when learning a new language (e.g. educational background, gender, culture, motivation).

## **5.5 IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY**

Greater demands on university students to be academically proficient in English (locally, but also globally) necessitates a continuous change in the EFL curriculum at Stellenbosch University to ensure the best possible approaches are being used to facilitate the development of English language proficiency. In language learning in particular, we need to move away from the top-down approach where the teacher provides the information and the student passively receives the information, to an approach where each individual student accepts responsibility for his self-development and the teacher facilitates the process whereby the student learns the skills to discover information for himself.

## 5.5.1 Amendments to the EFL curriculum

This research study suggests that all EFL students at Stellenbosch University, regardless of their English language proficiency, need guidance in improving their LLS use. The research findings have motivated me to propose some amendments to the EFL curriculum at Stellenbosch University to include classroom instruction in the use of LLSs. I have found recommendations by Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995a:314-316) for such amendments very useful and applicable to the EFL teaching situation at Stellenbosch University and I will draw on their suggestions. The following LLS can be taught in the everyday EFL classroom to assist learners in their development of English language proficiency.

### 5.5.1.1 Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies can be taught in the following ways:

- *Practising*: this would naturally involve repetitive activities such as role-play, games and creating a project together (e.g. a drama or a play).
- *Receiving and sending messages*: these activities should be aimed at getting learners to grasp the essence of the information as quickly as possible and should teach learners to skim and scan and English texts. Learners can be given practice in the use of resources such as different types of dictionaries, English grammar books, academic text books and journals, and magazines.
- *Creating structure for input and output*: these activities should be aimed at getting learners to create a framework or scheme, e.g. creating an outline of the main events and characters in a story which they have read. Learners can also be trained to take notes as would be required of them in an academic lecture setting. Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995a:314) suggests the use of the T-method for note-taking. Learners take a piece of paper and draw a T to cover most of the space on the page. Main ideas and key words are written on the top of the T's crossbar. On the left side of the T's vertical line, learners write down basic categories of information and on the right side of the vertical line they write down questions and comments. Oxford (1990) suggests teachers use the jigsaw listening activity to practise this strategy.

### 5.5.1.2 Compensation strategies

Compensation strategies can be taught in the following ways:

- *Guessing intelligently*: guessing meaning is a very useful LLS and teachers can teach this skill by having learners guess the meaning of short passages (initially) read to them. As learners become more proficient, the passages can be made longer and more intricate. Learners can also be taught how to guess the meanings of new words by making use of linguistic clues and by evaluating the context within which the word had

been used. For these class exercises to be meaningful it is however important for the learner to ask the teacher for help if he does not understand the method or text.

### **5.5.1.3 Metacognitive strategies**

Metacognitive strategies can be taught in the following ways:

- *Arranging and planning your learning*: this should be aimed at getting learners to set their own language learning goals and teachers should explicitly encourage and direct learners to move beyond classroom goals
- *Evaluating your learning*: learners can be taught to make their mistakes work for them in a class group work situation where learners identify each other's mistakes and correct them together. Learners can also be encouraged to make lists of their own mistakes and to tick them off once they have successfully worked on the mistakes. When teaching this LLS skill, it is important that the teacher monitors the progress and facilitates the error-correcting group work in class to avoid ill feelings between learners in class.

### **5.5.1.4 Affective strategies**

Affective strategies can be taught to lower learners' inhibitions and fears of the language use situation. These can be taught through *group activities* such as guessing games and singing songs. Learners can also be encouraged to speak about their feelings about the language situation in small groups where they can express their fears.

### **5.5.1.5 Social strategies**

Social strategies can be taught in the following ways:

Group work: where the majority of a class is perceived as favouring group work (as the case would be with a large group of Gabonese students in the EFL class), the teacher can make use of a lot of group work and work in pairs. Learners (like the Gabonese) who are used to group activities in their social structures will assist the teacher in making this approach work. It is important that the teacher carefully plans and monitors the tasks and projects in group activities.

## **5.5.2 Amendments to the classroom situation**

In principle, language learning strategy instruction and use can be undertaken at any educational level, in any number of forms, including both general and specific language learning skills objectives (Oxford & Leaver, 1996). Two important issues to consider in the instruction and use of such strategies are the degree of curricular integration and the level of learner control.

The degree to which learning strategies are integrated into an existing curriculum can be conceptualised as reflecting a continuum which extends from fully integrated, curriculum-based programmes to separate, task- or skills-specific instruction with near autonomous use by the learner. Several fully-integrated curriculum-based language learning strategies instructional approaches have been developed (Oxford, 1996; Cohen, 1998). However, one of the most important factors in successful strategy instruction depends on just how informed it is: the need, usefulness, and benefits of a given strategy are emphasised along with a focus on direct, explicit instruction. Ultimately, the strategies which learners make the most use of and those which yield the most benefit are not necessarily those which reflect the best fit in terms of the learning objectives. Rather, those which prove popular with students and bring tangible results are ones readily adapted to their learning level and disposition (Rausch, 2000).

The adoption of fully instructional curriculum models with integrated strategies requires some adjustment on the part of teachers. It is teachers who must undergo a crucial conceptual shift toward a learner-centred classroom, making the necessary adjustments in their existing curriculum, and learning the specific techniques of language learning strategies and instruction. They must accept the problematic element of uncertainty inherent in curriculum change. Teachers are often uncomfortable with making such changes and thus ignore or resist introducing learning strategies (Nyikos, 1996). This is particularly true in an environment rife with pedagogical and curricular contradiction concerning how and what students should be taught as we are experiencing in South Africa currently.



The idea of a "control continuum" is a notion developed by Oxford and Leaver (1996) to describe the successive levels of awareness, attention, intentionality, and control which learners can develop in their use and understanding of language learning strategies. In any given learning situation, students will be at different levels of using language learning strategies and will furthermore approach increasing levels of learning strategy control with different time frames. The first step in strategy instruction is generating awareness, which can be accomplished by introducing the concept of learning strategies and having learners complete a learning strategies use assessment. Assessment activities such as surveys, think-alouds, diaries, and group discussions do not explicitly or directly implement strategy instruction, but they can be useful in helping students reflect on their own intuitive and existent intentional strategy use. At the 'attention' level, language learning strategies are introduced and learners note which strategies are used for specific learning tasks and objectives, thereby developing an individual database of learning strategies. 'Intentionality' is an active step in which learners autonomously select strategies for learning objectives on the basis of a triangular fit of individual learner/learning objective/learning strategy and their



increasing experience. 'Control' is considered the highest level of strategy use, in which learners plan, self-assess, and evaluate overall strategy use and self-adjust use while continually incorporating a broad range of language learning strategies in their studies. In a sense, learning strategy control returns the learner to the state of unconscious awareness of learning strategy, but in this case, by virtue of familiarity and ease of use (Nunan, 1996).

Learning strategies researchers have generated many lists of strategies reported by students. I found a very useful table of LLSs that could benefit teachers and students in the LLS learning process.

## TABLE OF LEARNING STRATEGIES

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION
<b>A. METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES</b>	
Organise / Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set goals</li> <li>- Plan how to accomplish the task</li> <li>- Plan the task or content sequence</li> </ul>
Manage Your Own Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Determine how you learn best</li> <li>- Arrange conditions that help you learn</li> <li>- Seek opportunities for practice</li> <li>- Focus your attention on the task</li> </ul>
Monitor	<p>While working on a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Check your progress on the task</li> <li>- Check your comprehension as you use the language. Do you understand?</li> <li>- Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense?</li> </ul>
Evaluate	<p>After completing a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task</li> <li>- Assess how well you have applied the strategies</li> <li>- Decide how effective the strategies were in helping you accomplish the task</li> </ul>
<b>B. TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>	
<b>1. USE WHAT YOU KNOW</b>	
Use Background Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Think about and use what you already know</li> <li>- Make associations</li> </ul>
Make Inferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use context and what you know to figure out meaning</li> <li>- Read and listen between the lines</li> </ul>
Make Predictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anticipate information to come</li> <li>- Make logical guesses about what will happen</li> </ul>
Personalise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relate new concepts to your own experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings</li> </ul>
Transfer / Use Cognates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language</li> <li>- Recognise cognates</li> </ul>
Substitute/ Paraphrase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Think of a similar word or descriptive phrase for words you do not know in the target language</li> </ul>
<b>2. USE YOUR IMAGINATION</b>	

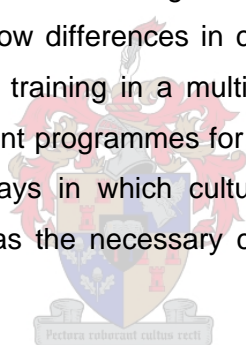


Use Imagery	- Use or create an image to understand and/or represent information
Use Real Objects / Role Play	- Act out and/or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language - Manipulate real objects as you use the target language
<b>3. USE YOUR ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS</b>	
Find / Apply Patterns	- Apply a rule - Make a rule - Sound out and apply letter/sound rules
Group / Classify	- Relate or categorise words or ideas according to attributes
Use Graphic Organisers / Take Notes	- Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, and charts) of important relationships between concepts - Write down important words and ideas
Summarise	- Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information
Use Selective Attention	- Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas
<b>4. USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES</b>	
Access Information Sources	- Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials - Seek out and use sources of information - Follow a model - Ask questions
Cooperate	-Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback
Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)	- Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.
© 2003 The National Capital Language Resource Center, Washington, DC <a href="http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/motivating/strategytable.htm">http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/motivating/strategytable.htm</a>	

## 5.6 FUTURE ACTIONS

Much research has been done with on the relationship between LLS use and language proficiency outside of South Africa (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; Nisbet, 2003; O'Maley & Chamot, 1990 & 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Phakiti, 2003; Purpura, 1997; Rubin & Thompson, 1982). A few studies of this nature have been undertaken in South Africa (Dreyer, 2000; Mahlobo, 1999; Kamper, Mahlobo & Lemmer, 2003; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a & 1995b), but they focused primarily on South African citizens who had to develop their English proficiency for study purposes, both for secondary and tertiary studies through the medium of English. These South African students live in a country where it is most probable that they are exposed to English daily. This research study was done in South Africa, but the participants were all non-South African and from countries where English is not a language used in everyday communication. Even given the minor differences in the various populations of participants in all the above-mentioned research that has been conducted with regard to the relationship between LLS use and language proficiency, the findings have been very similar in that they have found a significant relationship between the use of LLSs and the development of language proficiency.

Working from the assumption that the use of LLSs are essential in the development of English language proficiency, further research should be conducted into how best to integrate the learning of such skills into the EFL curriculum at Stellenbosch University. Since this research has already provided an overview of the situation, action research would be a logical next step to establish the most effective ways in which to introduce the learning of LLSs into the EFL curriculum. More parties should also be involved in the action research process – a larger and more diverse sample of students, all of the EFL teachers, as well as faculty members who have worked with students who have passed through the EFL programme and were admitted to postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University. In this proposed action research several lines of inquiry should be pursued, such as whether instruction in LLSs in the EFL curriculum should be integrated in the regular class or whether it would be better to have separate classes on psycholinguistic factors which would include instruction in LLSs; whether students should be informed of the purpose of the training in LLSs or not; whether it will be beneficial to include LLS training in English for Special Purposes courses; how LLSs should be taught to learners at different levels of English language proficiency; and also how differences in culture and educational background can be facilitated with regard to LLS training in a multi-cultural EFL classroom. It should also include well-grounded development programmes for the teachers involved so that they have a good understanding of the ways in which cultural and educational background could influence learning style as well as the necessary competence to teach language learning strategies.



Immediate actions with regard to improving the development of English proficiency in the EFL class at Stellenbosch University can, however, be taken by increasing the teacher awareness of LLSs and by encouraging teachers to include learning strategies in their EFL instruction. Language instruction can be greatly improved if the teacher and learner both have a greater understanding of the factors which influence the learning process. A very useful book that could be recommended to teachers, is *Teaching by Principles: An Integrative Approach to Language Pedagogy*, (Brown, 1994). This step will assist in future research, because teachers will have a greater awareness and knowledge of LLSs to be able to contribute meaningfully to the research.

## 5.7 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This research study explored the desirability of including language learning strategies in the EFL curriculum for international students. I have learnt that training EFL learners in the use of language learning strategies could enhance their development of English language

proficiency, resulting in a more meaningful academic experience for them (and probably also their academic supervisors) at the University.

To put what I have learnt into practice would however require more directed research to also include a variety of other factors which have been indicated to impact on the development of language proficiency, viz. the nature of the target language, the level of language learning, sex/gender, affective variables including attitudes and motivation, specific personality traits, learning style, career orientation, nationality, and aptitude (O'Malley, et al, 1989; Oxford, Ehrman & Nyikos, 1988; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Van der Walt & Dreyer, 1995a).

This study has firstly contributed to my understanding of the importance of learning in the most effective way possible, particularly with regard to developing proficiency in a non-mother tongue language. I have also however learnt a great deal about qualitative research and the many frustrations that can arise when an initial plan has to be adjusted. This was not ultimately a negative experience, since I gained first-hand experience of the fact that the human (social) factors in research are often not predictable or and cannot be controlled. To gain a better understanding of the complexity of a learning situation it is therefore more valuable to engage in research which is primarily qualitative in nature as opposed research which is predominantly quantitative in nature.

I do however deem it necessary to include a notable section of quantitative work in a study of this nature and I would furthermore increase the population size of the sample in this type of research to include at least 50 participants with at least 5 participants per country and with a gender distribution to include in the study at least 40% of each gender. Research by Oxford and Nyikos (1989) have found a significant relationship between gender (or sex as they referred to it) and LLS use. They reported that in their study of 1 200 students with a more or less equal distribution of males and females, females reported significantly more frequent use of conversational input elicitation strategies, reflecting social interaction (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989:296). This is an area I was unable to draw meaningful information from in this research study and it is definitely an area that needs investigation.

This study has contributed to my understanding of the value of LLS use instruction in the language classroom and also the value of LLS research. I have learnt that the language learning situation is a complex one and I realise simple, short-term interventions are unlikely to be as effective as long-term intervention where LLS use instruction is included in the language learning curriculum.

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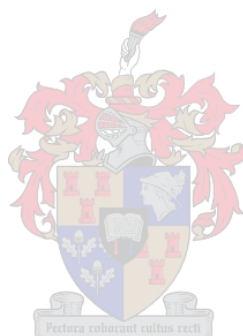
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## ADDENDUM A

### TEACHER INTERVIEW RELATED TO 7 EFL PARTICIPANTS: OCTOBER 2005

Questions prepared for EFL teacher to serve as a guideline for the interview.

All good teachers note distinctive things about their students.

1. What did you note about each one of these students?
2. What distinctive strategies did you note in each of the students during the course?
3. How was this different from the other students in the class?
4. All the students who took the TOEFL test for the second time improved their scores. What do you think was different about them the second time round?
5. What strategies did you try to incorporate in the EFL class / curriculum?
6. How did you set about doing this?
7. What successes do you think you achieved? (Evidence, if so/ If not – what does the reason seem to be?)
8. Other factors at play? (Culture? Educational background? Gender? Motivation? Logistics? Other?)

## ADDENDUM B

13 October 2005: Interview with an EFL teacher at Stellenbosch University

*Teacher:* Kan ek maar Afr praat?

*Interviewer:* **Ja, jy kan maar Afr praat.**

*Teacher:* Die groep studente oor wie ek kommentaar gaan lewer: ek wil net graag sê in watter verband ek met hulle kontak gehad het.

Uit hierdie groep van 7 studente, het ek baie spesifiek net vir mnr S, vir Mnr M M en vir H-J baie spesifiek klas gegee en dit was ongeveer 7 tot 8 weke intensief – 24 uur per week. Die ander studente het ek nie voor intensief klas gegee nie, maar ek het met hulle as 'n groep te doen gehad deurdat ek spesifiek 4 ure / week in die middag met hulle 'learner strategies' – Brown - behandel het, waar ek vir hulle self die vrae laat invul het en dat ons gesprekke gehad het daarrondom. Ek het met hulle sekere vraelyste gedoen uit Covey se boek '7 habits of highly effective people' en ook ander motiverende material uit neuro-linguistiek sodat studente beter idêe kon hê van linker-brein, regter-brein en ook die effek van wat hulle hulle eie 'self talk' rondom die proses van taal leer op hulle het. As hulle vir hulleself negatief gesien het in die hele proses of negatiewe taal gebruik het, dan, wat die effek daarop was hoe hulle hulleself sien en hoe hulle hulself in die klas sou sien of in hulle prestasie. Nou, ek het dit gedoen omdat ons in Feb 2004 begin met al hierdie studente by uitsondering van A, wat toe alreeds 7 weke Engels in 2003 agter hom gehad het. En dit was vir ons as personeel by die program vir Engels vir internasionale studente teen Junie baie duidelik dat die studente 'n baie nou idêe. beeld gehad het van waaroor Engels gaan: dit was die beeld van Eng = handboek en 'n toets wat jy skryf of 'n eksamen en 'n klaskamer en as jy hier uitstap dan is Engels nou verby en dit was asof hulle nie die baie groter prentjie van taal en hoekom hulle hierdie taal gereedskap aanleer en hulle eie toekoms regtig kon sien en verstaan nie en daarom was hulle ongemotiveerd, maar hulle wereld was klein. As jy hulle gedaag het om interaksie te hê met Engelssprekende studente was dit vir hulle baie moeilik om deur hulle comfort zone te kom – vir die meeste van hulle. Ook het ek persoonlik gevoel dat die studente nie – veral die Gabonese studente in Gabon – nie goed ingelig was oor waaroor dit gaan oor die aanleer van Engels regtig nie vir die volgende jaar in SA nie en watter prestasies hulle moes behaal het in Eng om opgeneem te word in die Hons M of D grade – dit was asof hulle net die idêe gehad het van ons kom maar en doen so bietjie-bietjie Engels en dan woeps is jy in 'n Hons klas. En daarom het ons gevoel ons moet die studente help om proaktief verantwoordelikheid te neem vir hulle eie leerproses in Engels. So, my rol was dus, wat ek gesien het: om in die program hierdie groep studente te neem – daar was ander ook in die klas – en dan met hulle spesifiek learner strategies te begin deurwerk en te begin gesels.

*Interviewer:* **Wanneer het hierdie proses begin? Wanneer het jy vir hulle begin “learner strategies” leer?**

*Teacher:* Dit het gestrek van, ja, plus minus begin Junie tot einde Julie so die 1e TOEFL wat die ouens geskryf het, was in daai tydperk.

*Interviewer:* **Ja, die 1e TOEFL was aan die einde van Julie so hulle het toe al 'n paar klasse in learner strategies by jou gehad.**

*Teacher:* Ja, dis reg. Dit was 6 weke van 4 uur elk.

**Interviewer: En hoe was die learner strategies aangebied? Was dit apart of was dit geïntegreer in hulle klasse, in hulle daaglikse klasse?**

**Teacher:** Nee, dit was net heeltemal apart in die middag aangebied. En dit was klein groepe besprekings, partykeer het hulle van die vraelyste ingevul, partykeer het ons dit daar in die klas ingevul, dan het ons gesels daaroor en ek het hulle met aanvullende materiaal gedaag om opnuut neer te sit en skryf wat hulle eie doelwitte is, wat hulle vir hulself langtermyn sien, wat hulle vir hulself korttermyn sien. Dit was nogal vir hulle moeilik, want dis abstrakte goed en om dit te verbaliseer. Ek het selfs gevind om die learner strategies met hulle deur te werk, moes 'n mens die taal baie vereenvoudig het en dan was daar somtyds nog van die studente wat gesukkel het.

**Interviewer: As hulle die vraelyste voltooi het, het jy die gevoel gekry dat hulle nie die vrae verstaan nie of dat hulle bestaande vrae wel verstaan het?**

**Teacher:** Meestal het hulle. En dit was so 'n tipe klas waar as 'n student dit nie verstaan het nie, dan sou 'n ander student dit vir hom in Frans verduidelik het so dit het nie gegaan oor die aanleer van Engels per se nie, maar oor om Eng te kan aanleer: wat moet ek dink oor taal? Wat moet ek verstaan van taal? Van my eie brein? Wat moet ek verstaan van pro-aktiwiteit en van verantwoordlikheid neem vir myself. Ek sal nou net nog hier in section B nommer 8 praat by 'other factors that play a role'. Dis nou nog voor ons die strategieë begin het, maar wat ek ook nog wou sê is waste effek sal dit hê op die ou end. Ons is bewus daarvan – ek het nie dokumentasie nie, maar dis mondelingse oordrag, dat veral die Gabonese nie 'n baie goeie leerkultuur het nie. In vergelyking met bv die Koreaan.

**Interviewer: By leerkultuur: wat sluit jy daarby in?**

**Teacher:** By leerkultuur bedoel ek dat 'n leerling verstaan, maar dit wat ek leer en ontdek, nr 1: is my eie verantwoordelikheid; nr. 2: ek wil my eie wêreld daarmee skep en daarom gaan ek my eie potensiaal bereik deur myself te motiveer. Ek wag nie vir iemand wat voor in 'n klas staan om vir my te sê: 'Jy moet dit doen' nie. Ek wag nie vir iemand in my gemeenskap om te sê luister as jy my kan, dan sal jy h/d posisie en daai posisie beklee nie. Dit sien jy bv. Met die Koreaan en die Duitser in die klas: dat hulle alreeds daai stappie geneem het, selfgedrewe, niemand in die society gaan vir hulle iets op skinkbord geskenk gee nie – ek moet die impetus aanmekaar: ek moet die wiel aan die rol hou. Ek is die drywer agter die wiel. Natuurlik, as jy sekere mense in jou society ken, dan is dit tot jou voordeel vir die Duitser en die Koreaan ook, maar jy kan nie daarop staat maak nie, terwyl in die andersoortige kultuur van die Gabonese, wat se sosiale patroon baie anders is as bv. Die van die Duitsers wat individualisties is, sal die Gabonees meen: my pa sal vir my 'n plekkie kry of my oom sal vir my 'n job kry of jy werk deur 'n ander sisteem en nou kom hy by US studeer en hier werk dit nie so nie. Jou prof gaan nie vir jou in die M-klas toelaat omdat jou oom die prof ken nie, of daar is nie eers 'n oom wat die prof ken nie, jy moet volledig op jouself staan vir daai prosesse. Jy moet kan sê: jy moet my in hierdie program inneem, op grond van, omdat.. So, die probleem waarmee ons gesit het, was onbewustelik het ons Gabonese studente hulle ou leerkultuur...ja, hulle het hiermee aangekom in SA en daarom het ons gevoel moet ons hulle in 'n leerkultuur kry van: ek moet uithaal en wys. Ek moet aan die einde van 'n jaar vir die prof kan sê: Luister, op grond hiervan en hiervan moet jy my in daai Hons klas inneem. Ek gaan daar wees op grond hiervan en hiervan.

So, ja, so ek kan regtig sê, voor ons nog hierdie goed aangebied het, het jy ander... 'n Koreaanse student of 'n Duitse student normaalweg of as ek nou sal sê: ek van M praat en S...: hulle selfmotivering was baie hoër as die Gabonese s'n.

**Interviewer: Was hulle toe ook deel van hierdie leerstrategie klasse van jou in die middag?**

*Teacher:* Ja.

**Interviewer: En wou hulle dit bywoon? Was dit vrywillig? Of was hulle verplig om dit by te woon?**

*Teacher:* Dit was verplig – dit is deel van jou hele pakket gewees, maar hulle wou nie op daardie stadium in die middag... hierdie groep het toe al jou high intermediate/ upper intermediate stadium bereik en hulle was nie gewillig om nou nog (jy weet soos die ander outjies het ons almal practical events gehad wat jy uitgaan in die dorp: jy gaan praat met mense in die dorp, of gaan versamel Engels vir jou woordeskat in 'n winkel of watookal..) en ja, dit, selfs die feit dat hulle dit nie wil doen nie, het vir ons gewys dat ons moet help om vir hulle te sien, maar daar's 'n groter wêreld in Engels wat jy moet leer. Goed nou gaan ons meer spesifiek terugkom Section A, nr 2:

Ek sal dadelik se dat M, die Duitser, dit wat ek van haar weet: sy was baie meer geneig om haar LB te gebruik, linkerbrein strategieë, ek kan nie vir jou sê watter presies nie, maar my algehele gevoel van haar in die klas en ook die hele jaar wat ek met haar te doene gehad het, daar is baie meer analities te werk gegaan, terwyl ek die gevoel gekry het dat (jammer ek het nie die uitslae van al die vraelyste wat ons gedoen het nie) daar was meer regterbrein geneigdheid van taak aanpak by die Gabonese studente. Ook met die Koreaan, meer LB terwyl die Gabonese studente geneigd was as hulle die geleentheid gekry het en die blootstelling sou hulle baie makliker informeel gemeng het en gesels het so die praat-luister was vir hulle belangriker, waar lees-skryf strategieë vir die Koreaan en vir die Duitser meer NB was in die leerproses. Beide M en al die Gabonese het baie moeite gedoen om deur die loop van die jaar uit hulle “comfort zones” te kom en met SA studente te kommunikeer. H-J by uitstek het baie goed gemeng met SA studente – sy het trouens ook 'n SA “boyfriend” gehad. Terwyl die Koreaanse student glad nie, byna glad nie enige strategieë toegepas het om sosiaal te verkeer of om vriende te maak nie.

Interviewer: So, hy het gedink daardie emosionele strategieë is onnodig?

Teacher: Ja, en weereens het dit te doen ook met sy perspie van waaroor gaan dit in taal aanleer en die persepsie wat ek gekry het was weereens ek kom na SA, ek leer bietjie taal aan, nou gaan doen ek my Meestersgraad en my Meestersgraad kry vir my sekere deure oop in Korea. Dit gaan nie oor date k die kultuur wil: I don't want to enter the culture and access the culture. Dis oraa, ek kan maar weggaan na 3, 4 jaar in SA sonder om een of 2 SA vriende te hê. Solank ek net gesit het in 'n klas, my navorsing gedoen het en my papier gekry het.

**Interviewer: Daar was omtrent 15 Koreaanse studente in die Engelse program. Het jy dieselfde tipe houding by die meeste van hulle bespeur?**

*Teacher:* Nee, die 2 jonger Koreane wat ons gehad het, het ivm die 5 ouer Koreaanse studente heeltemal 'n ander aanslag gehad. Dit was baie makliker om hulle te oorreed dat taal ander, dat daar baie ander redes is waarom mens taal studeer: dat jy die kultuur ingaan, dat jy moet vermeng en dat jy

maksimale blootstelling wil hê. By die jonger Koreane het jy gesien 'n begrip daarvoor en trouens ek het kontak met hulle en veral met SJ en dit is vir my merkwaardig hoe sy verskil van die ouer Koreane.

**Interviewer. Sou dit ook 'n geslagskwessie kan wees aangesien sy 'n vrou is en al die ander mans was?**

**Teacher.** Nee, ek sal nie dit sê nie. Trouens Koreaanse vrouens oor die algemeen word geleer om baie meer terughoudend te wees as mans, baie meer reserved uit confusionisme. Maar ek sou sê dit het te doen met die geslag waartoe hulle behoort – die jonger geslag. En hulle wêreldbeeld en ook met hulle diepere motief vir Engels leer. Ja, die jonger ouens was gewillig om te waag so hulle het strategiee aanvaar en gewaag en besef, ai, maar dit is toe nie so verskriklik nie, terwyl die ouer ouens sit met: I can't lose face. Ek kan nie waag nie, want ek kan nie my naam krater maak nie. En dit is so inhiberend. Dis vreeslike gestileerde formele vriendskappe. Gister het ek 2 van hulle gekry. Na 2 min, 3min se gepraat, kan hulle nou nie verder gaan nie, terwyl as ek 'n Gabonese student kry, dan is daar adinfinitum van gesels en uitruil van kennis so weereens as ek net dit mag opmerk: 'n persoon soos Son het 530 gekry vir sy TOEFL, maar dit is maar 1 faset van Engels. As ek hom vergelyk met van die ander studente en waar hulle uiteindelik in die wêreld sal kom met hulle Engels, dan is daar geen vergelyking nie.

**Interviewer. Ja, hy het ook gekies om nie weer te gaan skryf nie. So hy wou nie sy TOEFL verbeter nie.**

**Teacher:** Ja, "I play it safe". M: van al hierdie studente kan ek die meeste eintlik oor M sê: dat sy geweldige moed aangelê het. Sy het 3 keer die TOEFL geskryf. Dit wil sê tussen elke TOEFL en tussen elke kursus (sy was ook die oudste, sy is 41) het sy besluite geneem (nou, daai besluite kan strategiee wees) wat sy nuut aangelê het, wat sy nuut aangepas het. Van hulle moet wees om haar emosioneel te ontwikkel om haar meer bloot te stel en meer bloot te stel en sy was gedetermineerd om elke keer terug te kom en haar 550 te kry. Sy was ook die een wat die dag toe ons die strategiee die eerste keer in die klas gedoen het, die vraelys, letterlik haar oë het gerek en gesê het: You know what? Is this what is happening? Is this why I am learning like that? But now I should change this. How am I going to change this?

Van die ander ouens, die 2 van hulle uit hierdie groep, wat ek sou sê die meeste gaan werk het met die strategiee, is A en M, wat besluite gaan neem het. Daar was 'n ander een ook wat nie ingesluit is nie, P, en hy het tussen die tyd wat ons die strategiee gedoen het, he thy werklike besluite geneem van hoe gaan ek my luister verbeter en hy het elke week ekstra ure gaan insit, in die middag met material wat ek vir hom gegee het, en met kontak met ander student om sy luister te verbeter.

**Interviewer. So uit hierdie groep uit is dit M, A en P wat werklik iets gaan doen het met daai klasse wat jy aangebied het.**

**Teacher.** Ek wil amper nou sê as ek geweet het jy gaan hierdie, dan sou dit goed gewees he t om te sê nou gaan werk met hulle na onse middagklasse en gaan kyk waaraan het hulle gewerk spesifiek om dan....maar ek het dit nie daai tyd gedoen nie. Ek kan eerlik sê net weer dat overall: daar was vir my 'n nuwe bewustheid by die hele groep. Bewussyn van ja, it is really up to me. Wat tussen my en 'n prof op die ou end gaan gebeur, tussen my en my regering en hoe ek myself gaan negotiate, dit hang van my af en Ant het vir my kom sê eendag lank nadat ek die goed vir hulle gegee het oor strategie:

Hy het nou weer van die goed gaan lees en skielik het die hom soos 'n voorhamer getref. So dis ook maar die ding van goed wat insink, maar dit moet wakker gehou word, want dis nuwe gewoontes wat aangeleer moet word. Kom ons kyk nou nog.... What LLS underlie successful performance.

**Interviewer: As jy nou dink aan die mense wat meer suksesvol was op die TOEFL: watter gemeenskaplike kenmerke in leer het hulle gedemonstreer wat die ander nie gehad het nie. As jy bv. Vir M vergelyk met H-J**

**Teacher:** Defnitief, M se emotional strategies, haar konstante toegewydheid, dedication, ek wil amper sê dis dieselfdes as wat ek sien by S ook. Dis nie 'n geval van ons leer nou vir 2 dae en dan lê ons bietjie slap vir 6 dae nie, bv. Ons het die intellektuele vermoë. 'n Student soos M en S kom uit culture waar daar's konstante, jy leer aanmekaar.

**Interviewer: So hulle het baie gebruik gemaak van repitisie ook?**

**Teacher:** Ja, you stay on it all the time en jy's in jou klas, jy's daar. Eintlik moes ek van hierdie goed gaan lees het. Ek vermoed 'n ou soos Son het dalk alreeds die TOEFL gaan skryf in Korea. So ek dink nie dit was sy eerste skoon probeerslag nie, maar met M, ek wil amper sê jy sien daai probeer oor en oor.

**Interviewer: Haar TOEFL het verbeter, maar dink jy haar Engels se gebruik het verbeter? Dis nie asof sy net geoefen het om hierdie toets te kan deurkom nie?**

**Teacher:** Nee, nee, nee, haar Eng in die algemeen het verbeter van die being van die jaar af. Haar uitspraak is bietjie beter, dis nie meer so "heavy German" nie. Sintakties-morfologies: haar skryfwerk het verbeter, haar 4.5 het sy gemaak aan die einde van die jaar. Haar woordeskat het verbeter, haar manier van bond met mense, haar socio-linguistic pragmatics, haar vermoë om grappe te maak, nuances te snap. Sy kon vir haar werk negotiate in SA! Sy wil permanent hier bly en sy het al daai goed prakties in Engels geken. Sy't ook, haar selfvertroue het gegroei. Om haar wereld te beheer: ek dink mens moet M se ouderdom in ag neem en dat daar sekere Duitse vorms is wat gefossiliseer het in haar uitspraak, maar dit maak nie, dit neem nie weg van die feit dat sy werklik gevorder het nie en dat sy op die oomblik 'besigheid in SA begin vestig. Trouens, sy kan baie betekenisvol, meaningful kommunikeer. Ek dink nie iemand soos sy hoef nog kursusse te doen nie. Ek dink sy moet net verbreed in wat sy het. She can make meaning. Ek sou eerder sê sy moet Engles in Business doen, want dan's dit gefokus op wat sy wil doen ens.

**END OF SIDE ONE OF THE AUDIO CASSETTE**

**Interviewer: Dink jy dit is agv die vaardighede wat Michalea geleer het wat sy haar Eng toe nou kon verbeter? Nuwe strategies wat sy aangeleer het?**

**Teacher:** Ek dink defnitief dit het 'n rol gespeel. Ek het dit ook so probeer aanbied en spesifiek een dag moes hulle gaan sit en hulle moes vir 2 ure skryf wat hulle wou bereik dmv die feit dat hulle nou Eng aanleer en nou Eng magtig is. Dit is diep dinkwerk wat 'n ou doen. Ek het 'n vermoede dit is soos spiese: dit verskerp jou bewussyn en jou awareness. Ek kan nie vir jou eerlik sê watter strategie dit is nie, maar ek kan duidelik vir jou sê dat daar 'n nuwe vlak van bewussyn is en ek glo dit het 'n impak. Ja, dit sal nou interessant wees om met haar te sit en te vra in watter opsigte dink sy dit het 'n verskil



gemaak. Ons het sulke seutelwoorde gehad wat ons vir mekaar gesê het: bv. If you think you can, you can; if you think you can't, you can't. Daar was so 'n hele paar en dit was die taal wat ons vir mekaar gesê het in daai tyd. As iemand in die klas gekom het en hy was af, sou die ander vir hom gesê het: You've got to cope with the chaos. Of die 10 rules of language learning: You've got to risk all the time, step out of your comfort zone.... So, in hoe 'n mate dit het, kan ek nie vir jou regtig sê nie, maar daar was 'n ander bewussyn, en as ek nou moet sê: sê nou maar sy moes in SA kom doen wat sy nou doen en sy het nie blootstelling aan Engels gehad nie dan dink ek sy sou harde bene gekou het. Wat ek baie v.d strategieë hou soos Brown dit opgestel het, is dat dit spreek alle fasette aan: learning with others, managing your emotions, Daar het sy bv gesien dat sy goed saam met ander leer, maar sy het nie in die begin daarvan gehou nie – sy moes keuses maak. En as ek weer ook daarna kyk, Gabonese hou oor die algemeen daarvan. Hulle was goeie, behalwe E, het hulle goed in groepe gewerk. Die Koreaan hou nie van gorpewerk nie, because they lose face. Then you can't face it! What do I think was different the 2<sup>nd</sup> time round? As ek probeer kyk, kom ons sê, jy het probeer met die strategieë en met gesprekke met die studente het ons van Juniemaand vir hulle laat projekteer wat in Oktober gaan wees en ons het gesê jy moenie net kyk na Oktober nie, jy moet kyk waar jy moet wees verder, so met predictions het ons vir hulle probeer help (dit mag nie noodwendig in Brown se strategieë ingesluit wees nie) maar om te beplan (to predict, to plan, to prevent). Dit was die goed wat ek spesifiek saam met C (die hoof van die EFL program) probeer doen het met die studente na die uitslag van Julie se TOEFL na Okt toe. Maar nie korttermyn net dink aan Okt nie, maar sê wat gebeur daarna – jy moet verder dink. So, hoe gaan jy die volgende paar maande aanpak? En beplan en doen. En as jy nie die TOEFL maak nie en jy kry ook nie plek by die Universiteit nie, wat is jou ander alternatiewe? As jy na ander Univ of colleges toe gaan, wat hulle vra. As jy Amerika toe gaan, so ek wil amper sê die feit dat jy ouens gedaag het met ver vooruit dink en om verantwoordlikheid te neem vir nou, het gemaak dat jy nie 'n geweldige: Hier het jy Julie en hierdie ouens is nou by upper intermediate en nou moet hulle aangaan met advanced hier, advanced 1 en dan Okt advanced 2. Jy sou half verwag dat studente se bywoning minder raak, want hulle is nou keelvol om van Februarie tot hier in die klas te wees, maar ons het gevoel as ons vir hulle sekere insette gee oor die volgende paar maande en oor die volgende jaar dat ons moontlik hulle kon motiveer om meer te doen en dat hulle weet die prof wat gaan besluite neem of die mense wat gaan kyk in die toekoms, gaan kyk na TOEFL plus klasprestasie plus vorige univ prestasie plus algemene gedrag (motivering, ons het dit vir hulle uitgespel). Kan jy in groepe werk? Gaan jy uit jou comfort zone? Doen jy ekstra moeite met jou Eng? So, binne moontlik in die lig van daai pakket, het ouens individueel besluite gemaak en natuurlik het hulle nog 'n paar weke meer Eng gehad so jou blootstelling, exposure, met 'n onderlaag van... ek kan nie vir jou sê hoeveel keer verlede jaar ... hulle het my mos die "big picture" genome... het ek my studente gehelp om te kyk na "waar wil jy wees?" Waar moet jy wees en waar wil jy wees en wat doen jy elke dag elke week om te sorg dat jy daar kom. So, ja ek sou dus sê daar is 'n kombinasie van meer exposure wat hulle gehad het: as jy darem 6 weke meer, 25 ure per week in 'n klas is, dan moet dit 'n effek hê op jou, maar iets wat ons ook gedoen het, wat ek spesifiek gedoen het tussen Julie en Okt met een van my groepe. Die 1 student wat baie daarby gebaat het, wat dit op sy eie gedoen het, maar met my hulp, was P. Hy't sy listening skills geweldig verbeter en H-J was in die klasse ook waarin ek dit gedoen het so daar was 2 van hulle waar ons spesifiek aan listening skills gewerk het.



**Interviewer:** In die TOEFL is die eerste gedeelte oor listening skills en sy TOEFL het verbeter.

**Teacher:** Ja. Ok, laat ek sien of daar nog iets is wat ek vir jou kan sê. What strategies did you try to...in EFL class curriculum. In die curriculum was dit by uitstek die hele kurrikulum van die Internasionale program was dit by uitstek my passie om nr 1 te sorg dat die studente deur die hele jaar weet: pro-active principles and what's the end in mind? Wat is my "big picture?". En ek kan vir jou die terugvoer gee wat my stduente vir my gegee het daarvan en dit is wat hulle vir my gesê het: dit het hulle op hulle tone gehou. Dis 'n konstante bewussyn wat jy skep by alle studente. Nie vir alle studente het dit dieselfde impak nie. Maar dit is nou maar soos dit in die lewe is: as ek en jy nou ook 'n kursus gaan doen wat gaan oor strategieë; jy sal daaruit neem soos wat jy diep in jou hart voel – ek verstaan hierdie goed en jy sal dit gaan toepas. So party studente het dit regtig verstaan en hulle het dit gaan integreer in hulleself.

**Interviewer:** En van hierdie groep studente: dink jy hulle het dit gaan integreer?

**Teacher:** Die 2 wat ek die meeste terugvoer van gehad het is M en P: bewustelik en onbewustelik. Ek kan nie van die ander sê nie. Buiten h/d groep was daar ander studente wat vir my verbaal kom sê het wat of hoe hulle werk op die oomblik en in die EFL klas het ek by tye, dan sou ek 'n seksie neem en dan sal ek van die strategieë neem en dan daai week dit sterk onder die studente se bewussyn bring en sê ok, (ek sê nie vir hulle ons gaan nou hierna kyk nie) hierdie week op 'n interessante manier laat ek hulle goals skryf vir hulle Eng – net vir hierdie week. Ek wil hierdie week elke dag 10 nuwe woorde aanleer en ek wil 'n Eng persoon vra om hulle vir my uit te spreek. Dan doen ons dit vir daai week. Op 'n ander tyd sal ek weer ander strategie probeer uit 'n ander seksie: the student tries to stay calm whenever he has to use English. Of jy sê vir hulle: wat het nou gister gebeur: julle het nou almal gaan 10 vrae vra vir 10 studente en watter gevoel het jy gehad? Nee, ek kon nie vra nie; die spoeg het opgedroog in my mond. Dan vra jy: wie se spoeg het nie opgedroog nie? Nou, dan sê jy: staan nou op en gaan noun a daai ou toe en dan gaan vra jy vir hom wat is dit? Hoe kry hy dit reg en dan maak jy vir jou miskien 'n belsuit van ok, ek kan dit doen. Ek kan dit dalk nie nou heeltemal haal nie, maar ek kan dit en dit doe nom 'n bietjie beter dit te doen.

**Interviewer:** So jy het dit in jou klasse geïnkorporeer?

**Teacher:** Ja, ek het dit in my klasse geïnkorporeer.

**Interviewer:** Het julle opleiding gekry, lesings gekry waarin julle aangemoedig is, waarin all onderwysers aangemoedig is om dit oral in die kurrikulum in te bring?

**Teacher:** Nee. My dit is asof ek die laaste paar jaar in my klasse net meer en meer agtergekom het daar is buiten die taalgereedskap, is daar baie gereedskap en begrip wat 'n student moet hê – oor himself, oor sy taal aan leer, dat hy ontspanne daarvoor kan wees en dat hy dit kan geniet. En omdat ek wou weet wat dit is, het ek gaan sit en dit was vir my 'n groot stuk vreugde toe ek nou in Brown afkom op daai vraelys. Ek dink nog steeds die vraelys in Eng .. ek dink advanced students kan dit maklik invul, maar jou laer vlakke studente sukkel met die taal so jy moet dit vir hulle verteerbaar maak of stukkies vir stukkies insit. So, van 2002 het ek. Eke ht voor 2002 ander strategie in my klas ingeneem, bv. Om 'n studente van die begin af te help om raak te sien. I've got to be proactive. What am I doing

about it? Goed wat ek ontwikkel het, kon ek goeie lyne trek met wat Brown doen, maar nie naastenby so omvattend nie en ook nie naastenby so ineressant nie en die feit dat jy op die ou end met scores kan kyk waar's ek sterk, waar's ek swak, wat doen ek.. en nou voel ek 'n ou moet dit verder uitbrei. Ons het dit later begin op personeelvergaderings bespreek en nou kan ek sien waar ek nou is, daar is spesifieke learner strategies waarvan jy 'n student kan bewus maak as jy onderrig gee, maar daar is al klaar duisende strategiee wat 'n student klaar gebruik wat jy vir hom moet help om te sê, maar ek het dit al klaar. Just bring it to the surface en laat uit wat hy het, laat ander ouens daarvan leer. So dis vir my baie opwindend en ek sal, wat ek nou met die mediese studente ook doen, is hierdie goed. Jy't nie so baie tyd daarvoor nie, maar ek werk baie gefokus op hulle, van: Waarheen is jy op pad? Wat wil jy behaal? Die korttermyn in die kursus, maar in die langtermyn is dit in terme van die Wes-Kaap en SA en so aan. Ja, dit gaan vir my oor om taal in 'n hele ander perspektief te stel as maar hierdie ou vakkie wat jy maar doen en jy gaan nou 'n ou sertifikaatjie kry. Ek kan net nie tevrede wees daarmee nie – nie naastenby nie. Nog iets...

What strategies did..... Brown s'n met 'n spesifieke groep om hulle bewus te maak van die strategiee en hulle te daag om keuses te maak nav hulle scores, wat hulle gaan doen en dan het ek hierdie enersyds het ek dit in die klaskamer ingewerk en as 'n student baie gesukkel het, dan het ek hom laat kom na my toe in die middag, ek het hom die vraelys laat invul – al is dit eers net 'n 1 fase. En dan het ek gesê: Wil jy hieraan werk? En dan het hy gesê: Ja, ek wil hieraan werk. Ek kies om nou aan hierdie een en hierdie een te gaan werk. Dan vat jy net baie realisties en gaan werk nou constant nou aan hierdie ding en wanneer jy sien hier is nou 'n effense deurbraak, dan vat ons 'n tweede een. No overload. En dan het ons dit meer onder kollegas bekend gemaak. Maar in my gesprekke met jou het ek agtergekom, maar jy is besig daarmee en dit het my opnuut opgewonde gemaak daarvoor. What success do you think you achieved. Ek dink op hierdie oomblik nie net in terme van die TOEFL nie, maar ek dink itv die hele groep en van die hele groep wat ons mee verlede jaar gewerk het, dink ek het hulle verantwoordelikheid geneem vir hulleself soos wat ander groepe voorheen nie geneem het nie, Indirek het van hulle dit vir my kon sê. Direk kan ek sê dat my gemiddelde klasbywoningsyfer tussen 80 en 85% per blok was deur die hele jaar.

**Interviewer. En dit was hoër as jou kollegas s'n?**

**Teacher.** En dit was hoër as my kollegas s'n.

Dit het my laat besef daar is iets wat my studente begin verstaan het rondom wie se... in who's court is the ball. Oor die algemeen dink ek het dit 'n effek gehad op die hele program – 'n goeie effek. Hoë gemotiveerdheid ten spyte van fluktuasies, ja, met die Gabonese was daar altyd een of ander krisis... as dit nie geld was nie... jy weet tog, hierdie Oktober uitslae is ook gekoppel aan 'n tyd toe die ouens nie geweet het of daar geld is nie; vir verdure studies. Hulle het nie geweet wat hulle toekoms inhou nie. So, there ability to survive en om deur te gebyt het, sê vir my dat daar in die algemeen iets positiefs gebeur het. Ek sal graag by hulle nou wil gaan sit en sê ok.. Van dit wat ons gedoen het, watter van dit kan jy onthou? Edson het vir my gesê hy's nou so beindruk, want hy't nie geweet bv. Dat hy leer hoofsaaklik met sy linkere brein nie. En dat hy nou wees hy moet sy regterbrein ook leer gebruik. Ok, nou hoe gaan hy dit doen? So, bewussyn is daar, maar bewussyn is nog nie by resultate nie. Maar ek kan nie vir jou eerlik sê hierdie een het nou spesifiek met hierdie klomp goed gaan sit nie.

**Interviewer:** Is daar een van hierdie groep wat jy dink nie vordering getoon het nie ten spyte van al die moeite wat jy ingesit het?

**Teacher:** Nee, ek dink hulle het almal gevorder.

**Interviewer:** So daar het definitief inslag gevind – by party net meer as by ander?

**Teacher:** Ja, in besonder dalk. As ek na hierdie groep kyk. Dis nou weg van strategiee, maar dis tog ook deel van strategiee, dit beteken ook hoe jy uit jou kultuur uit klim en weer binne in die ander kultuur geïdentifiseer raak. Hulle het ek nie 'n probleem oor met die feit dat hulle in die toekoms in die wêreld sal kan ingaan met hulle Eng nie en dat hulle sal kan 'negotiate'. He can 'negotiate a masters for himself. Dan gaan ek terug na Korea, en dan sê ek maar net weer ek twyfel....

**Interviewer:** So, jy dink sy Eng sal kwyn?

**Teacher:** Dit sal atrofeer. Taaldood definitief. Ek kan nie sê hy sal dit heeltemal verloor nie, maar dit sal geleidelik atrofeer. In die lig ook daarvan dat die volwassene alreeds so 'n kurwe het 'n 'decline'. Ja, so dit maak my nog steeds hartseer. Dit voel altyd vir my of ek mens net kan hierdie ouens vat vir 2 weke wanneer hulle hier kom, trouens ek gaan dit nog doen met nuwes. Dat jy net 'n language immersion camp het met alle volwassenes. Jy speel sport, jy speel games, jy breek daai ding. Jy "nurture". Dit sal met die ouer ouens, volwassenes nog steeds nie so maklik gaan nie soos met die jongeres nie. Ok, maar hierdie ding van kom en dan soos die een student ook vir my sê: O, I go to St Pauls. (Ek wou nog vir hom vra: Hoe baie sing jy? Maar ek het nie die hart nie.) I go to St Pauls sometimes and the Korean church. Nou, dis 'n sekere resep vir.....  
Maar in elk geval...

**Interviewer:** Is daar nog iets van die studente wat jy graag met my wil deel?

**Teacher:** Ek dink kultuur speel tog 'n rol in watter strategiee aanvanklik sterk ontwikkel is.

**Interviewer:** En so ook opvoedkundige agtergrond?

**Teacher:** Opvoedkundige agtergrond.

**Interviewer:** Soos deur watter opvoedkundige sisteem jy gekom het?

**Teacher:** Baie beslis.

**Interviewer:** Miskien het mens ook nie by die aanleer van jou eerste taal daai strategiee ontwikkel nie?

**Teacher:** Kyk die Gabonese sal vir jou sê ons sit in 'n klas en iemand gee vir ons klas en jy hou jou bek en jy kry en jy dink nie daaroor nie. Maar miskien oor educational background, die Koreane het ook vir my gesê as jy nou dink aan strategiee om emosionele blokkasies te oorkom, om in die klas met ander studente maklik te praat en te antwoord en dan buitentoe: hulle sê in hulle klas word jy... daar's so baie leerlinge en die tyd is so min, en nou mag jy nie praat nie, jy mag nie vrae vra nie. Met die gevolg is jy is skielik in 'n sisteem waar ons verwag dat studente moet initiatief neem en meer vrae vra en dank aan hulle dit nie doen nie.

**Interviewer:** So hulle kan nie vinnig genoeg dink nie?

*Teacher:* En die een Koreaanse damesstudent wat ons verlede jaar gehad het, ons het haar ge-time. Sy't eenkeer vier minute geneem om 'n vraag te antwoord. Toe ons haar probeer konfronteer daaroor, toe bars sy in tranes uit. En dit was vir haar baie traumaties en vir ons, want toe vertel sy vir ons in haar skool as jy durf 'n vraag gevra het of gepraat het in die klas, dan na die skool, dan kry die ander ouens jou. Hulle slaan jou of hulle skel jou vrot uit en abuse you verbally, want jy neem tyd van hulle af weg wat die onderwyser nie vir hulle meer kon leer nie. So die hele sisteem van wat in die klaskamer gebeur, beïnvloed ook watter strategieë 'n student sal toepas. En as 'n student uit 'n sisteem uit kom waar daar die hele tyd net goed op die bord geskryf word en jy moet afskryf, en nou werk ons baie visueel en interaktief, dan raak dit ook daai student.

*Interviewer:* **So sou jy dink dat dit nuttig sal wees om studente strategieë aan te leer alvorens mens begin met 'n taal kursus?**

*Teacher:* Ek is absoluut oortuig daarvan dat jy nie direk in 'n taalkursus kan ingaan nie, dat jy voor jy in 'n taalkursus ingaan, noem dit oriëntering, wat ook al. Dat jy nr.1 vir hulle op 'n ander, vrolike manier laat verstaan waaroor dit gaan. Dat jy hulle self help om te ontdek wat is daar in hulle koppe oor taal en taal aanleer. Waar is hulle nou? Waar moet hulle wees? Watter rol wil hulle bydra? Dis nie vir my genoeg om net 'n student te vra "Why are you learning English?" nie. Dit is vaag. Dit moet 'n pertinente vraag wees swat die ou laat dink. Waar sien ek my in so en so situasie en in watter opsigte dink ek gaan ek Engels gebruik? In my besigheid wat ek vorentoe gaan hê? Of nie. Hoe meer die brein kan links maak, hoe meer is die ou reg om in die leersituasie te wil neem wat daar gegee word – dat dit soos 'n magneet is. Nou is dit vir my fantasties dat ek lees dat agv die language acquisition devise wat 'n kind het, is sy brein soos 'n magneet. Hy neem in. En ek voel ons moet leer deur o.a. learner strategies wat ons vir hulle mee help, maar ook vir hulle ontdek wat hulle klaar het, vir hulle help om te verstaan wat is die magnet in jou eie brein wat jy het en hoe skep jy daai magnet. Hoe maak jy? Regtigwaar.

*Interviewer:* **So dis iets wat jy sou verander in die EFL program as jy nou die program kan herstruktureer?**

*Teacher:* Absoluut. Absoluut. Ek het so probeer verlede jaar dat die eerste week (AM het saam met my klas gegee), dat die eerste week het ons nie Engels gedoen nie. Ons het net aandag gegee aan hoekom elkeen Engels nodig het en hoe ons te werk moet gaan om dit moontlik te maak in die EFL klas.

## ADDENDUM C

Research data from the SILL questionnaire completed by 22 Gabonese English teachers who studied English at Stellenbosch University in 2006

Name	Sex	Reported scores on categories						Total
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
Gabonese 1	M	31	53	27	42	20	29	202
		<b>Ave 3.44</b>	<b>3.79</b>	<b>4.50</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>4.83</b>	<b>4.04</b>
Gabonese 2	M	27	52	18	42	22	30	191
		<b>Ave 3.00</b>	<b>3.71</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>5.00</b>	<b>3.82</b>
Gabonese 3	M	27	47	20	33	15	16	158
		<b>Ave 3.00</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>3.16</b>
Gabonese 4	M	26	54	21	40	18	28	187
		<b>Ave 2.89</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>4.44</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>3.74</b>
Gabonese 5	M	32	59	24	41	25	28	209
		<b>Ave 3.56</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>4.56</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>4.18</b>
Gabonese 6	M	27	56	17	43	17	27	187
		<b>Ave 3.00</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>4.50</b>	<b>3.74</b>
Gabonese 7	M	32	46	20	34	21	24	177
		<b>Ave 3.56</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.54</b>
Gabonese 8	M	24	50	19	36	16	24	169
		<b>Ave 2.67</b>	<b>3.57</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.38</b>
Gabonese 9	M	28	47	18	41	13	25	172
		<b>Ave 3.11</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>4.56</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>3.44</b>
Gabonese 10	M	38	56	24	39	15	17	189
		<b>Ave 4.22</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>4.33</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>3.78</b>
Gabonese 11	M	27	52	23	42	22	24	190
		<b>Ave 3.00</b>	<b>3.71</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.80</b>
Gabonese 12	M	25	47	21	37	16	23	169
		<b>Ave 2.78</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.38</b>
Gabonese 13	M	29	44	22	32	23	25	175
		<b>Ave 3.22</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>3.50</b>
Gabonese 14	M	28	49	22	32	19	23	173
		<b>Ave 3.11</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.46</b>
Gabonese 15	M	27	42	12	42	19	20	162
		<b>Ave 3.00</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.24</b>
Gabonese 16	M	26	50	21	42	23	29	191
		<b>Ave 2.89</b>	<b>3.57</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>4.83</b>	<b>3.82</b>
Gabonese 17	M	32	42	18	34	17	18	161
		<b>Ave 3.56</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.22</b>
Gabonese 18	M	23	42	21	31	17	20	154
		<b>Ave 2.56</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.08</b>
Gabonese 19	F	25	45	21	32	23	19	165
		<b>Ave 2.78</b>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>3.30</b>
Gabonese 20	F	22	43	19	33	17	19	153
		<b>Ave 2.44</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>3.06</b>
Gabonese 21	F	17.00	35.00	19.00	23.00	10.00	20.00	124
		<b>Ave 1.89</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>2.56</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>2.48</b>
Gabonese 22	F	27.00	51.00	19.00	37.00	13.00	17.00	164
		<b>Ave 3.00</b>	<b>3.64</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>3.28</b>

## ADDENDUM D

### FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS: August 2006 and September 2006

#### *What do you think is a good way to learn a new language, for example English?*

M: For me the way to learn English is the direct one. I learn as we have contact with the language itself like when you practise to speak it.

I: *and the grammar then, would you learn grammar or not?*

M: We do learn grammar at school. Mostly we have to be in a situation where you have to speak English. My name is ????

F: My name is M. I think the good way to learn English is to be exposed to the language. It means that the person who wants to learn the language must hear the language and speak it at every time.

M: My name is A???? The good way to learn English is to have contact with the natives. To share English sounds and have conversation, read the newspaper where you going to get some words and you have to avoid any contact with Gabonese.

I: *How do you apply this in STB?*

M: I have to avoid Gabonese people while I am here.

I: *Do you seek out contact with English-speaking people?*

M: Most of the times. Thank you.

Next Male: I am O????? I think the best way for people to learn English is They need much exposure to the language first and by this I mean having contact with native learners. And providing if possible some audio-visual materials and they have to create an environment where people only speak English. I mean between students they must just speak English and have new words from teacher. For me it is the best way to learn Eng.

Next M: I'm M?????. For me the good way to learn Eng is exposure, to be exposed to English after an intensive course of grammar and the pronunciation lesson they should meet natives and exchange with them so that you can work on English.

I: *So the method you would follow would be to learn grammar and to gain some pronunciation experience and then you want to be immersed into an Eng environment? Is that correct.*

M: Yes of course. It is structured.

F: I think the good way to learn the new language is to be explained English as much as possible, that is to be surrounded by the language and people speaking the language.

I: *Do you think that is the only way to learn a new language? Should there be intervention?*

F: No, it can't be the only way. In addition you can also come to lessons and to listen to radio and TV and have a few lessons at school with a teacher.

Man: I think she has already said everything and yes to learn a language we have to be exposed because like we are in South Africa now and I think my English has improved, because in Gabon I don't really have opportunity to speak English. Mainly people who speak English they are scarce and you cannot find them. English is scarce so that means the even if I want to watch TV or listen to radio, the programmes are in French.

I: *Don't you have any English channels in Gabon?*

Man: Yes, we have BBC, but for example me, I live with my girlfriend. When I turn on BBC, she says, "Oh I don't understand that; you the only person in the house who understand English so I want to be



kind to her and we watch French programmes. So this is why I want this exposure because it is really necessary to learn a language by having a media such as radio, TV, even listening to music.

*I: Did you have that opportunity in Gabon? To listen to English music?*

Man: Yea, we listen to American music to live my American dream of singing.

*I: Ah, that's why you have an American accent. Man laughs.*

Man: Yes, that's so.

*I: And your name?* Man: My name is K???

Next male: My name is M????i

Like they have just said, Ah.... I think the best way to learn English is through exposure, because English is a living language. It is a language that one student just keep in mind, keep in the brain and when you learn a language like English you need to practice it. If you don't practice the language you can forget. You can forget. The best way to test your level in a language is through the practice, you have to practice it. But exposure is not enough, we also need to learn grammar. We also need to learn grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation with a teacher.

*I: Seems like you have done the practicing bit, because it seem like you have a slightly SA accent already.*

Man: Yes, laughs.

*I: So you most definitely made the best of this opportunity in SA.*

New man: My name is Me???. I think I am going to be tell you also what they said. It is to me the best way to learn the new language as English through exposure. Take for instance in our country, in Gabon, where we speak French, it is quite impossible to find people who speak the language so if you're not exposed to the language it will be very difficult to learn the language. Then if you learn at school, but you need to practice the language. That's all.

Next man: My name is Abs??? I will give you my answer according to my experience from Gabon where there is no English in the country. You know Gabon is a French-speaking country. I can say that grammar is the best way to learn a foreign language. Why? Because to me language, grammar is the rule of language and you cannot use it without any rules. So why grammar, because grammar is a kind of what you may call intensified course. Grammar you can listen and come across new words. You start to learn to know how to use it in a sentence and then you learn how to use the language.

***I: What methods of strategies do you use to learn Eng? All the different strategies. Obviously you come to class.... What else?***

MI??: I spend my time listening to radio + watching TV and I meet native through soccer. I go out to look for Eng people en just interaction most of the time.

Next M: First I watch the programmes in Eng on TV and sometimes I watch movies and attend meetings with Eng friends and so forth and to make sure that my pronunciation is correct I all the time stand in front of the mirror to watch myself to make sure my pronunciation can be interesting and be attractive to some people.

Next M: First it is possible to learn how to use vocabulary. I look at new words in the dictionary. I ask native speakers about words. And I practice to combine different structures. I listen to TV and radio and to people speaking. I read the newspaper every day.

Mad??: I learnt Eng at school, but to improve my Eng I try to speak it with people who speak Eng as much as possible. And I listen when I go to church and I find words that I heard for the first time. That may be some place that is good to learn Eng.



Male: Listening to the radio, TV and from time to time I hear new words that I check out in the dictionaries. I do have many friends speaking Eng, the natives and I help myself to make my Eng better.

*I: Do any of you sit down and study grammar?*

Male: We all studied grammar, but the way we studied grammar was the way we call the grammar-translation way. We only did with grammar in some classes. Only in some classes we deal with text, because we will be exposed to some unfamiliar sound. But, yeah, we study grammar as educators. From the first level, 1<sup>st</sup> form we studied grammar 'til terminale, the final stage at school.

*I: So at this stage in your life you don't sit down and study grammar. Your method of preference is to go and meet native speakers and practice Eng in context?*

Male: It is the first stage where we expose ourselves to Eng and then we create a situation for ourselves. We try to be passionate about what we are doing. This first stage we're really motivated to meet native people and we reach university, of course, yes, we do have this passion to meet native people. It's not like when we were too young, you see.

Male: I want to agree with what he just said and I will also say to check our pronunciation we need to speak with natives; for example I ask something to ??? and he says to me: "Say that again please" and then I think I didn't pronounce it correctly and then wonder what to do.

Female: At first I learn grammar because that was the only way we could learn this, but sometime I start to speak. But now I still find things I don't understand and then I go to check the grammar and the dictionary. So, I still study grammar sometimes.

Male: I want to say that our 1<sup>st</sup> Eng was mainly this grammar, and we required the writing skill, so today we need to improve skills in speaking and listening.

Male: The first, I use getting in touch with English speakers like Nigerian, because I have some friends like that so I used to experience what I learnt.

Next M: I learnt differently. You know at school we only studied grammar. In addition to that I also had some friends that are English speakers and at school we had English clubs. We were exposed to language there, but elsewhere we spoke only French and I also can say that when I was young I like to listen the music and through listening to the music I learnt many things.

Next M: My one is different. At school we only learn English through the grammar-translation method, because that is the main method used by English teacher in Gabon. Also myself I mainly learnt English through English now because I learnt American hip-hop songs. And also my father is from Nigerian origin and he speaks English, but the problem is the Nigerian accent, the Nigerian broken English is not sound good. So one gets used to speaking the Nigerian English, it is very bad, because at school sometime you will pronounce words in the way Nigerian people do and people will laugh at you. Because I remember my first day in an English classroom, I was in class 1 secondary school, and them we were being taught about the months of the year and then December I said December like the way Nigerian people say and everyone laughed.

***I: That brings us to our last question: How Gabonese children + young adults are taught Eng. At what age do you start learning Eng in Gabon and what exactly happens in an Eng classroom in Gabon?***

M: The British.

*I: So you believe we should use a variety of methods to learn English?*

M: Yes. Classes and music and friends.

Next M: What I can say about me is that I also learnt English through music. So in Gabon I was singing myself. The music I usually listen and sing is rap music and I was listening exactly what these rappers were saying in the text so each time I took a text I tried to write what they were saying even if the pronunciation was not always clear, but just to imitate them the way they were doing and this is exactly the way I learnt and you see my dictionary I used when I found new words and I found the

words in the dictionary. Now when I heard this expression being called, I keep it in my mind and by extension I had a member in London in the agency and we had kind of challenge and we spoke with each other and tried to see who got the most expressions. Like a competition.

F: The only method I learnt was grammar and also vocabulary at high school. I didn't have opportunity to speak a lot.

***I: HOW ARE YOU TAUGHT ENG IN GABON? AND HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM?***

*Did you have a native English speaker who taught you English? Did you speak Eng or French in class? How did things work in class?*

F: In my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years I got lessons...

*I: How old were you then?*

F: 13 years.

*I: Is that the age you start doing Eng? At more or less the age of 13?*

F: Yes. I had for two years English speaking teachers. And then I had Gabonese French-speaking teachers. The first one spoke only in English in class. But the Gabonese teachers spoke in French and English in class. They did the translation. I think that to improve the way of teaching Eng, the teachers have to be speak much English because if the doing translation the students will be hard to listen and learn. Maybe as we have learnt we write better than we speak and it's bad we were not really exposed to the language so if we want our students to improve, then they must be speaking to help them to quick learn English.

M: Just like everybody said, it is really grammar-translation. As I said, it is like you are afraid to do new thing, because most of the time when I used some words they tried to discourage me and said that my Eng was a slang one and not right one. What I have noticed is that I have learnt writing and listening skills and speaking is not very good. Also when you have a test it is mainly writing about the grammar and you answer yes/no questions, but no speaking was not tested and that is what we need in the teaching of English and the use of good English. We do not need writing only. This is why as lots of times people they cannot speak to you, but they have Masters degree in English.

M: I would first say we start Eng on average 12 -13 years. It was learning the methods of Eng – the basics. The teacher provides everything we need and we just write, but we don't have a kind of speaking skills, because French-speaking people teach us and their use of languages was strange to listen to. Teachers use French to explain Eng in class.

*I: And does that way of instruction continue up to your final year of Eng lessons? Or do teachers at some stage switch to explaining things in Eng?*

M: In the classes it depends now on the learners: if you are yourself now interesting in Eng you are going to do everything possible to better your Eng. That is not the same as the level at University, because now you start to speak, to practices Eng and make your own research and so on.

F: I can say it depends on the teachers. When I first learnt Eng, my teacher, as far as grammar is concerned, she came and wrote the grammar on the blackboard and then we as students had to copy it down and after that she explained and then we listened. When it was time for listening lessons sometimes she read the things she wanted us to learn. And so sometimes she had handouts in which the grammar was explained. At University it seems you were forced to improve your Eng – you were forced to speak only Eng. There was something we did at University – Eng was explained with Eng.

I: So at school at no stage was Eng explained through the medium of Eng? Always in French?

F: Depends on teachers again, because some of them used French and some used English.

M: Remember that Eng is in a French context and most of the time the teacher want to teach Eng to use Eng text. It makes it interesting. The teacher tries to give the Gabonese some rules and try to teach them to make the translation.

I: So you had some Eng in context because you read the text?

M: Yes. I have never had an idea about Eng so I learnt this from the Eng class. I learnt to like Eng. Most of the time when I did not understand something, the teacher explained in French.

M: I may come to the point to make it clear that we have 7 years of studying Eng at secondary school. Then during this 7 years we take 2 exams to: the 1-4 year we take one; 4-7 year (equivalent of matric here) we take an exam – an oral exam in Eng. You are judged orally. During this process you will only take an oral exam so you work out your exam with themes and so on. We do much, yes, we do work with oral skills in the 7 years and then you pass this exam. It is a prepared oral, because all the years you will be studying oral for all the years and the Board of Education gives teachers all the things to prepare the students for this during the year. You reach the equivalent of a matric here. This stage you work only oral skills because you will be exposed to econographic pictures and then you have to comment in Eng on the whole thing orally. During the 7 years of secondary school we work out oral skills; the 4<sup>th</sup> level and the 7<sup>th</sup> level. We also take a written exam in Eng, but it depends on the category in which you are. If you deal with scientific materials, you don't do an oral exam. But if you are in the literature branch you can take written form or the oral form – it depends on you. They are 2 separate subjects. The best way to drill Eng in students: when I was in secondary school we did have something like Eng clubs in which meetings are only held in Eng. The Eng club doesn't allow people to speak in French, because we deal with Eng. In this way we worked at our oral skills and this Eng clubs are supported by teachers to make sure that people can speak fluently Eng in their class. And that's where I learnt Eng.

I: Did the teacher encourage you to ask questions in the Eng classroom or were you supposed to only listen to the teacher? Did you have discussion groups in the classroom?

M: Of course, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> levels we used to present some themes in which 3 or 4 students would sit in front of people exposing their view about something they researched – a specific topic and then after that you have some questions that we asked those who were sitting in front. But the teachers encouraged the risk-taking. You cannot teach Eng or a language without teaching people to take risks so that people can ask questions. We feel comfortable to ask questions in class to ask some questions.

We are in a French context and some students find it funny to utter questions in Eng. If you pronounce badly people in the class will laugh at you, but we have some good teachers who say you don't have to laugh to anyone who wants to speak Eng.

